

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-23-105429](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Federal law prohibits employment discrimination against federal employees and discrimination in federal programs on the basis of race, among other things. GAO was asked to review VA's efforts to ensure equitable treatment of its employees and veterans receiving its services or participating in its programs.

This report examines (1) what disparities, if any, exist between VA employees from different racial and ethnic groups; (2) how VA tracks potential racial discrimination against its employees; (3) the extent to which VA has practices to prevent and address employment discrimination; and (4) how VA assesses and addresses issues related to the treatment of veterans based on race in VA programs. GAO reviewed relevant federal laws, and VA policies and documents; analyzed employee personnel data, survey data, and data on EEO complaints; held discussion groups with VA employees; and interviewed VA officials, representatives from VA's unions, employee affinity groups, and veterans service organizations.

What GAO Recommends

GAO continues to believe its prior recommendations on the structure of VA's EEO program have merit. GAO is making eight new recommendations, including that VA plan for and analyze data on reported discrimination and harassment and establish a comprehensive policy for addressing veterans' complaints. VA agreed with 7 recommendations and neither agreed nor disagreed with 1 to regularly conduct barrier analyses, which GAO continues to believe is warranted.

View [GAO-23-105429](#). For more information, contact Thomas Costa at (202) 512-4769 or costat@gao.gov.

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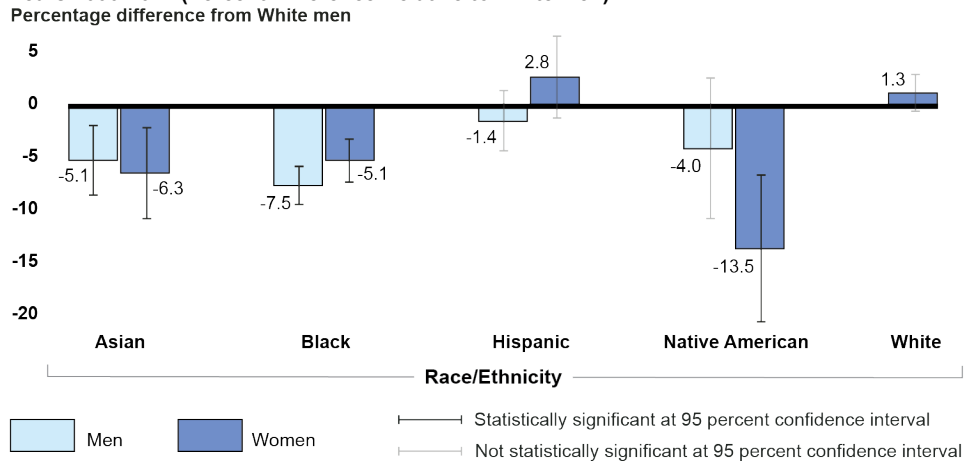
VA EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

Increased Attention Needed to Improve Program Effectiveness

What GAO Found

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has a diverse workforce, but disparities exist in career outcomes. GAO found that VA had higher representation of certain historically underrepresented racial and ethnic groups from fiscal years 2017 to 2021 than the national civilian labor force from 2014 to 2018 (the most recent data available). However, within VA's workforce, GAO estimated that from 2000 to 2021, certain of these groups hired into similar occupations had lower pay and attained fewer promotions than White men, on average (see figure).

Estimated Differences in Promotions of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) workers Hired into Similar Jobs 10 years after Starting Employment, by Race, Ethnicity, and Gender, Fiscal Years 2000-2021 (Percent Difference Relative to White Men)



Source: GAO analysis of Office of Personnel Management data. | GAO-23-105429

VA tracks complaints of alleged racial discrimination and harassment, but has not fully analyzed other data to understand potential prevalence. While VA has a goal to develop a dashboard to assess data on workplace climate, it has not planned for or conducted this analysis. Until doing so, VA is not best positioned to identify and address trends in potential discrimination and harassment.

The continued misalignment of its equal employment opportunity (EEO) program with a federal directive hinders VA's ability to prevent and address employment discrimination. In 2020, GAO recommended that VA address these misalignment issues by ensuring VA's EEO director is not responsible for personnel functions and completing VA's planned realignment of its EEO Program Managers. As of April 2023, VA has not taken action to fully implement these recommendations.

While VA has several programs that can receive complaints from veterans who feel they have been discriminated against in VA programs, it does not have a comprehensive policy to ensure complaints are addressed. This created several issues, such as (1) inconsistent processing of complaints; (2) lack of communication with veterans; (3) lack of coordination across the offices receiving complaints; and (4) lack of data on complaints. As a result, VA may not have visibility into whether veterans' complaints have been fully addressed, or the potential extent of discrimination against veterans in VA programs.