

Highlights of GAO-24-106189, a report to congressional requesters.

July 2024

DOD AND VA HEALTH CARE

Actions Needed to Better Facilitate Access to Mental Health Services During Military to Civilian Transitions

Why GAO Did This Study

Thousands of service members transitioned from military service to civilian life in 2022. During this transition period, research has shown that service members are especially vulnerable. Some may face challenges, such as the loss of a sense of purpose, post-traumatic stress disorder, or other mental health symptoms.

GAO was asked to review access to mental health services for transitioning members. Among other objectives, this report examines inTransition's enrollment process and efforts to assess performance. It also examines the extent to which the DOD-VA Joint Executive Committee has assessed the effectiveness of efforts to facilitate access to mental health services.

GAO analyzed inTransition program data for calendar year 2022, the most recent available. GAO also reviewed DOD and VA information on efforts that may facilitate access to mental health services and interviewed DOD and VA officials.

What GAO Recommends

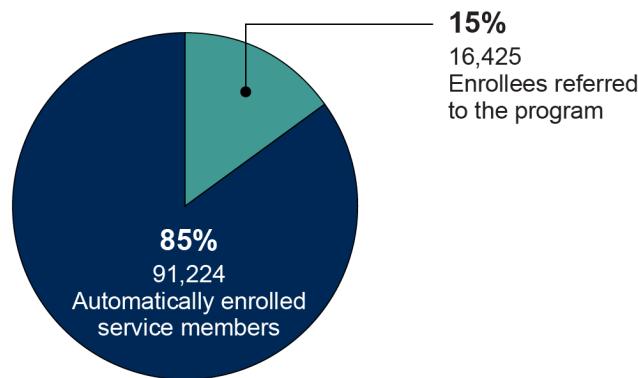
GAO is making five total recommendations, including that DOD revise inTransition's enrollment criteria and outreach policy and establish performance goals, and that the DOD-VA Joint Executive Committee assess the departments' efforts to facilitate access to mental health services. VA concurred with the DOD-VA Joint Executive Committee recommendation; DOD did not provide formal comments.

View GAO-24-106189. For more information, contact Alyssa M. Hundrup at (202) 512-7114 or hundrupa@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

The Department of Defense's (DOD) inTransition program assists service members who may need support with mental health services during transitions. It automatically enrolls members transitioning from the military who received mental health or traumatic brain injury care in the year prior to separation. In 2022, inTransition identified 85 percent of its enrollees through its automatic enrollment process. (See figure.) However, GAO found that inTransition does not conduct outreach to these enrollees until 2 to 3 months after their separation. This delayed timing may leave a gap in assistance to mental health services during a vulnerable period.

inTransition Enrollees, Calendar Year 2022



Source: GAO analysis of DOD data. | GAO-24-106189

GAO found that the inTransition program was unable to successfully connect with over 70 percent of its automatically enrolled service members in 2022. This was due, in part, to its outreach strategy, which relies on telephone calls. Expanding its outreach methods—such as through email, text, or the use of location services—could improve the program's ability to successfully connect with its enrollees and potentially increase participation in the program. GAO also found that the inTransition program tracks some performance data but has not defined the level of performance it aims to achieve. By establishing performance goals with measurable targets, the program could better assess its performance and use the information to make changes, as appropriate, such as to its outreach strategy.

The DOD and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Joint Executive Committee oversees military transition activities. GAO found that it identified an inventory of departmental efforts that may facilitate access to mental health services for transitioning members in 2022. However, it has not assessed the effectiveness of these efforts overall in facilitating access to mental health services during the transition period. As a result, the Committee does not know the extent to which there may be gaps, overlap, or other issues across these efforts. By conducting such an assessment and recommending appropriate changes, the Committee could help to better ensure that transitioning service members and veterans have access to the mental health services they may need.