

Why GAO Did This Study

DOD operates the largest employer-sponsored child care system in the U.S. It has reported that staffing shortfalls have contributed to lengthy child care waitlists in many DOD locations.

Senate report 117-130 includes a provision for GAO to review DOD child care shortages. This report examines (1) how DOD and the military services set child care fees and wages and calculate child care worker turnover rates, (2) challenges the military services face to recruit and retain child care workers, and (3) the extent to which the military services follow selected leading workforce practices for recruiting and retaining child care workers.

GAO analyzed DOD and military service documents about their child care programs and analyzed selected data. GAO also conducted in-person and virtual site visits to eight installations, chosen for their large waitlists, among other factors. Last, GAO analyzed child care workforce challenges, recruitment and retention processes, and leading workforce practices identified through prior GAO work.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making seven recommendations, including that the Air Force, Army, Marine Corps and Navy develop metrics to track the effectiveness of their child care program retention initiatives, and that the Air Force and Marine Corps conduct assessments of their child care workforces. DOD concurred with the recommendations.

View [GAO-24-106524](#). For more information, contact Kathryn A. Larin at (202) 512-7215 or larink@gao.gov.

MILITARY CHILD CARE

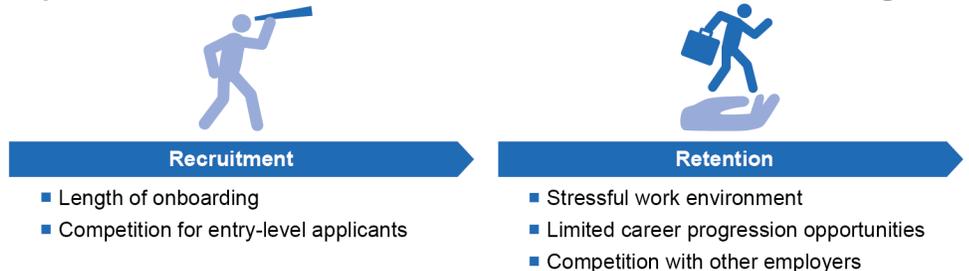
Services Should Assess Their Employee Retention Efforts

What GAO Found

The Department of Defense (DOD) provides the military services flexibility in determining hourly wages for child care workers, setting child care fees, and calculating turnover rates of child care workers. For example, DOD allows the military services to determine pay levels within set ranges, and the military services may raise entry-level pay within these ranges to compete with the local civilian labor market. Similarly, DOD policy provides the military services options to adjust the weekly child care fees that parents pay to be competitive with local labor markets or to charge comparable fees with the civilian child care sector. All four military services calculate child care worker turnover the same way and reported turnover rates ranging from 34 percent to 50 percent in fiscal year 2022.

Installation officials reported several challenges that affect the recruitment and retention of child care workers including a lengthy onboarding process. Navy officials said they adjusted the health screening policy to streamline the Navy's process. Other challenges include stressful work environments and limited career progression opportunities. For example, DOD and military service officials identified an increase in children's behavioral issues in recent years that has increased stress among child care workers. To assist with recruitment and retention, DOD and the military services offer several benefits, such as paid annual and sick leave, and recruitment and retention bonuses.

Reported DOD Child Care Worker Recruitment and Retention Challenges



Source: GAO summary of information collected during in-person and virtual site visits. | GAO-24-106524

The military services follow most of the selected recruitment and retention leading practices GAO evaluated. However, the Marine Corps does not follow three, the Air Force does not fully follow two, and the Army and Navy do not follow one. Implementing leading workforce practices is essential for successful recruitment and retention of military services' child care workers. For example, the military services continuously recruit year-round and provide financial incentives to new hires and existing workers, but they have not established metrics to track the effectiveness of their retention initiatives. By developing metrics to track the results of their retention efforts, the military services can identify which are most effective at retaining child care workers. Additionally, the Air Force and Marine Corps do not continually assess their child care program needs. By following these leading workforce practices, the two military services could better prepare for their future child care program staffing needs and help meet the child care needs of service members and their families, thus improving military family readiness.