

Coast Guard: Information on Medical Facilities

GAO-25-107073
Q&A Report to Congressional Committees
October 16, 2024

Why This Matters

The U.S. Coast Guard, a military service within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), is responsible for 11 statutory missions, including drug interdiction and search and rescue. In support of its missions, the Coast Guard provides certain health care services, such as annual physical examinations and immunizations, to approximately 47,000 active-duty and reserve personnel. The Coast Guard provides these services in coastal locations and on certain ships, such as vessels that deploy for multiday operations to help ensure Coast Guard personnel medical readiness. The majority of Coast Guard medical facilities are managed as part of its shore infrastructure. The shore infrastructure includes piers, docks, and boat stations at more than 20,000 government-owned or -leased Coast Guard onshore facilities at more than 3,000 locations. A smaller number of Coast Guard medical facilities are located on vessels and are thus managed as part of such vessels.

The James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023 includes a provision for us to study Coast Guard medical facilities.¹ We are providing information on the overall condition and management of Coast Guard medical facilities and how it manages the medical equipment for each medical facility.

Key Takeaways

- The Coast Guard had 165 medical facilities, including 34 medical clinics, nine satellite medical clinics, 65 ashore sickbays, and 57 afloat sickbay facilities, as of July 2024. These medical facilities vary in the amount of space they occupy, ranging from clinics that occupy the majority of a building to sickbays that occupy one room.
- The Coast Guard is confronted with a costly backlog of shore infrastructure projects, which include ashore medical facilities. Our prior work identified actions needed to improve management of its shore infrastructure and resource management. As of July 2024, the Coast Guard is in various stages of addressing our shore infrastructure recommendations.
- The Coast Guard reports that 22 of its 26 facilities with 51 percent or more space dedicated to medical and dental services are beyond their service life and are in various conditions.

What types of medical facilities and services does the Coast Guard manage?

The types of medical facilities and medical and dental services the Coast Guard manages vary based on the unit's mission, service needs, and the number of personnel served.² As of July 2024, the Coast Guard had 165 medical facilities, including 34 medical clinics, nine satellite medical clinics, 65 ashore sickbays, and 57 afloat sickbays. Figure 1 provides an overview of Coast Guard medical facilities.

Figure 1: Overview (and Number) of United States Coast Guard Medical Facilities, by Type, as of July 2024

	Description
<p>Clinic (34)</p> 	<p>A clinic is a Coast Guard-owned or -leased health care facility primarily intended to provide outpatient medical service for ambulatory patients. A clinic must provide health care necessary to support the operational mission of the unit, such as periodic health assessments, physical examinations, immunizations, medical administration, and preventive medical and sanitary measures. Clinic staff consist of a physician, administrator, and technicians, and may include dentists, nurses, and pharmacists.</p>
<p>Satellite clinic (9)</p> 	<p>A satellite clinic is an intermediate size health care facility under the operational control of a Coast Guard clinic but is located off-site from the clinic. It is intended to provide outpatient medical care for active-duty personnel, such as physical examinations and immunizations. Satellite clinic staff normally consist of one physician and three or more health service technicians.</p>
<p>Ashore sickbay (65)</p> 	<p>An ashore sickbay is a small health care facility on land for the care and treatment of active-duty personnel. Ashore sickbay staff consists of one health services technician.</p>
<p>Afloat sickbay (57)</p> 	<p>An afloat sickbay is a small health care facility on vessels for the care and treatment of active-duty personnel. Afloat sickbay staff consists of one health services technician.</p>

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Coast Guard documents and GAO photos; U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Kate Kilroy (bottom photo). | GAO-25-107073

The Coast Guard offers a limited range of outpatient medical and dental services to ensure medical readiness for its personnel. Individual medical readiness is the extent to which an individual active-duty or reserve member is free from health-related conditions that could limit their ability to fully participate in Coast Guard operations. For example:

- Clinics offer primary care, periodic health assessments, immunizations, optometry, dental, laboratory, and other health services, according to Coast Guard officials. For example, the Coast Guard’s Base Portsmouth clinic staff in Virginia provided annual physical examinations and immunizations to an estimated 3,500 active-duty and reservists and occupies the majority of the building where it is located.

- Satellite clinics may offer primary care, physical examinations, immunizations, and optometry, dental, laboratory, and other health services, such as pharmacy, according to Coast Guard officials. For example, Coast Guard’s Air Station San Francisco clinic staff provided annual physical examinations to an estimated 150 active-duty personnel and as needed, the 110 reservists at the Port Security Unit. However, the satellite clinic staff can only attend to one patient at a time due to the small size of the clinic.
- Ashore sickbays offer fewer services than a full clinic or satellite clinic because the staff consist of one health services technician whose primary purpose is to provide supportive services, first aid, and emergency treatment, among other things. For example, the Coast Guard’s ashore sickbay at its Grand Isle Station in Louisiana consists of a Health Service Technician who provides treatment, such as, for minor illness and injuries and immunizations, for the 25 active-duty personnel it serves, according to Coast Guard officials, and occupies one room.
- Afloat sickbays (i.e., medical offices on Coast Guard vessels) also offer fewer services than clinics and satellite clinics but are included aboard certain vessels, such as the National Security Cutter, that need to be medically prepared for months-long deployments.³
- The Coast Guard provides behavioral health services at some, but not all, clinics, ashore sickbays, and afloat sickbays.⁴ In the absence of sufficient mental health service providers, clinic staff told us various ways they attempt to “make do.” For example, officials at one base told us their behavioral health provider offered services to Coast Guard personnel assigned to several different states. Officials noted that when the provider was sent on a special assignment, no provider was assigned as a replacement and personnel went without mental health services. As our prior work has shown, the Coast Guard faces shortages with such services.⁵
- The Coast Guard offers video and telephone telehealth appointments for services such as primary care, pharmacy consultations, and components of the Coast Guard-required Periodic Health Assessment. The Coast Guard began offering these telehealth appointments to its personnel in 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶

What types of medical equipment does the Coast Guard use?

The Coast Guard uses a variety of medical equipment in its facilities depending on the unit’s operational needs. Coast Guard guidance, called the Health Service Allowance Lists, outlines the minimum amount of medical equipment for each type of medical facility.

Clinics. Coast Guard clinics may offer more health services with more medical equipment compared to a smaller station that may serve a few dozen personnel. Base Portsmouth, for example, serves thousands of personnel and offers such services. Figure 2 shows examples of Coast Guard medical equipment at clinics.

Figure 2: Examples of Coast Guard Medical Equipment at Clinics

Audiology sound booth



An audiology sound booth is a sound-treated enclosure used to conduct hearing tests.

Medical exam table



An exam table is a piece of furniture that provides a platform for patients during medical examinations and (on the wall) equipment for testing hearing, blood pressure, and temperature.

Medical x-ray machine



A medical x-ray machine is used to generate images of tissues and structures inside the body to identify, for example, a broken bone.

Oxygen tanks



An oxygen tank is a metal cylinder that stores oxygen under pressure (compressed oxygen) for oxygen therapy for medical cases, such as a lung condition or difficulty breathing.

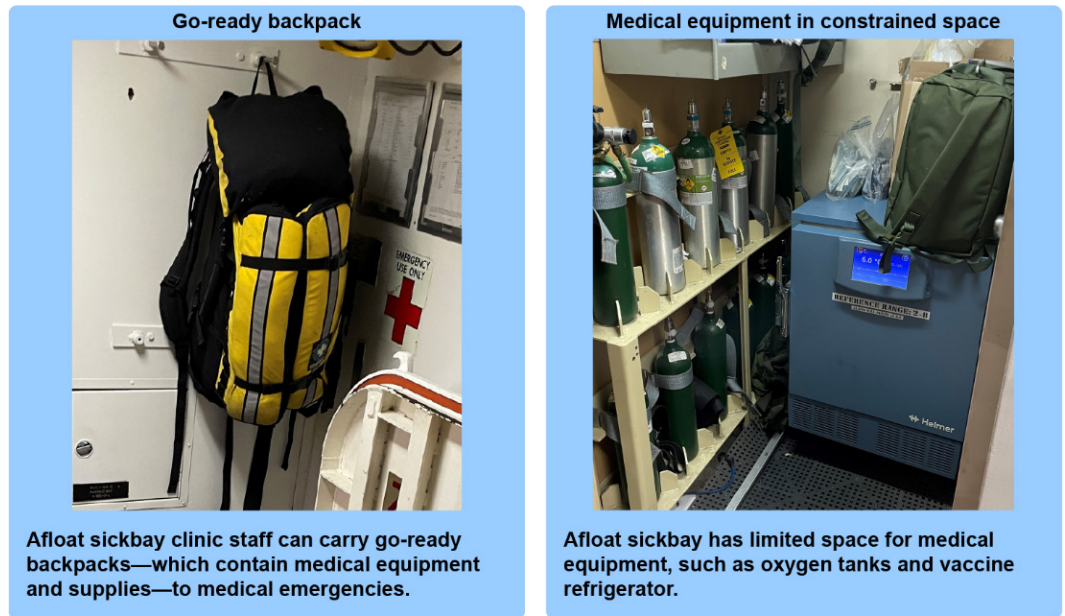
Source: GAO. | GAO-25-107073

Satellite clinics. Coast Guard satellite clinics may maintain medical equipment needed to administer immunizations and preventive medical measures.

Ashore sickbay. This type of a medical facility generally consists of one room that serves fewer personnel than a clinic and generally occupies less space and provides fewer health care services than a clinic. As a result, the medical equipment at an ashore sickbay, such as at a small boat station, is more limited.

Afloat sickbays. Afloat sickbays are a part of a vessel with space constraints similar to ashore sickbays and are deployed for a duration of time. In addition to the space constraints associated with a vessel, the quantity of medical equipment and supplies are also stocked in relation to the duration of the deployment, which can range from days to months. Figure 3 shows examples of Coast Guard medical equipment at an afloat sickbay, including a go-ready backpack and equipment positioned to occupy constrained spaces.

Figure 3: Examples of Coast Guard Medical Equipment on an Afloat Sickbay



Source: GAO. | GAO-25-107073

Some Coast Guard units require medical equipment to address unique situations. For example, clinic staff who deploy with a Maritime Security Response Team must bring medical equipment and supplies that can address injuries from chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and explosive threats, according to Coast Guard officials. These staff must be prepared to deploy within 2 hours and therefore must maintain and pack certain medical equipment to ensure its safe and timely transport. Figure 4 shows examples of Coast Guard medical equipment at a deployable ashore sickbay.

Figure 4: Examples of Coast Guard Medical Equipment at a Deployable Ashore Sickbay

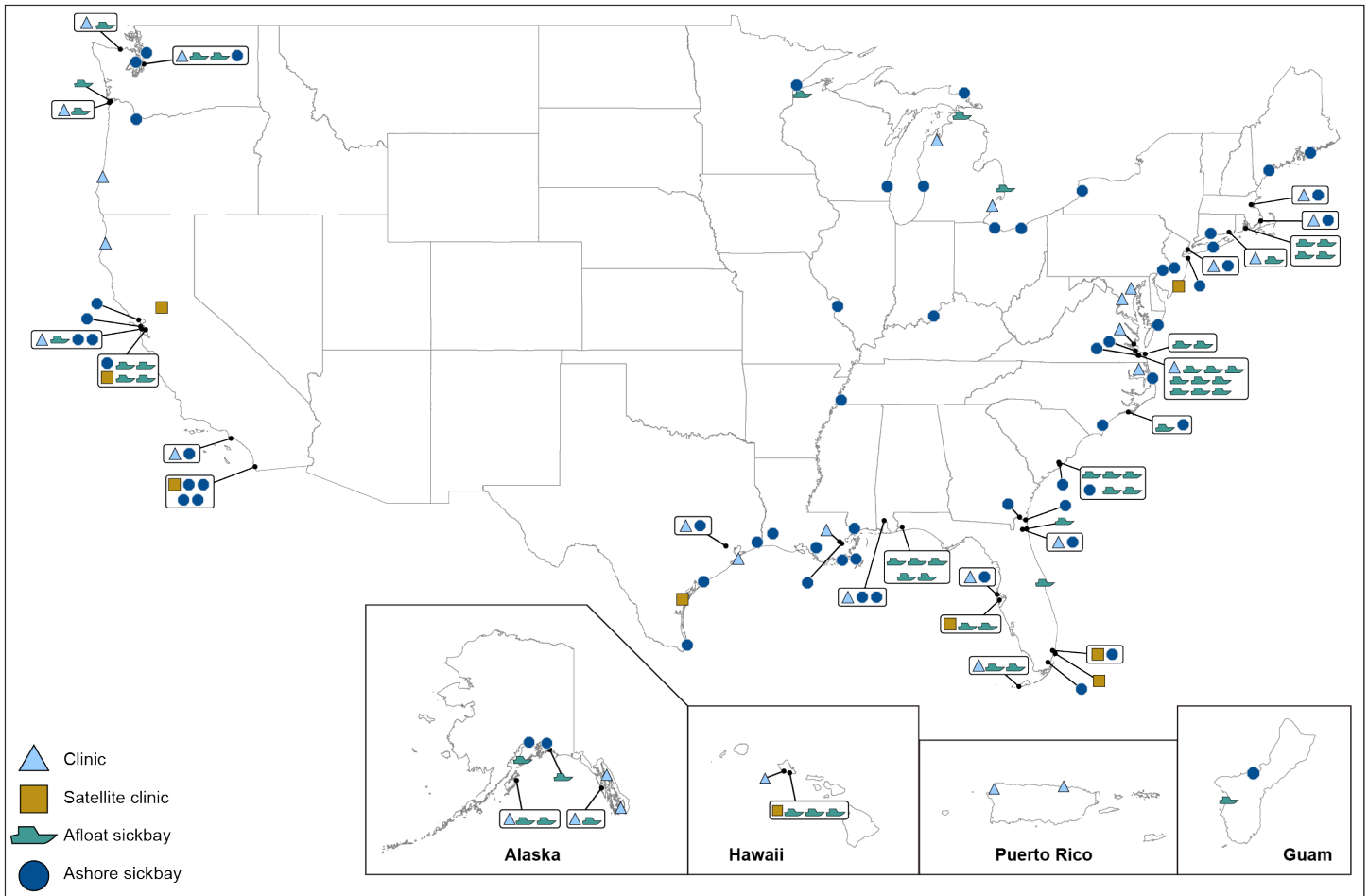


Source: GAO. | GAO-25-107073

Where are Coast Guard medical facilities?

Coast Guard clinics and sickbays are aligned with base and operating locations across the United States and some territories. See figure 5 for a map of Coast Guard’s medical facilities, including where certain vessels with afloat sickbays are stationed, such as National Security Cutters in California.

Figure 5: Map of United States Coast Guard Medical Facilities, as of July 2024



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Coast Guard documents; U.S. Geological Survey (map). | GAO-25-107073

Note: A clinic is a Coast Guard owned or leased health care facility primarily intended to provide outpatient medical service for ambulatory patients. A clinic must provide health care necessary to support the operational mission of the unit. A satellite clinic is an intermediate size health care facility under the operational control of a Coast Guard clinic but is located off-site from the clinic. It is intended to provide outpatient medical care for active-duty personnel. An ashore sickbay is a small health care facility on land for the care and treatment of active-duty personnel. An afloat sickbay is a small health care facility on vessels for the care and treatment of active-duty personnel.

What is the overall condition of Coast Guard Shore infrastructure?

The Coast Guard’s inventory of shore infrastructure assets, which includes the majority of medical facilities, is vast, aging, and in various conditions, and the service is confronted with a costly backlog of projects, according to our prior work.⁷ The backlog of construction and repair projects is contributing to concerns of affordability for the Coast Guard’s recapitalization—which can include replacing systems at the end of their useful life—to keep them in good condition. In February 2019, we reported that about 45 percent of the Coast Guard’s shore infrastructure was beyond its service life, and, at that time, it had backlogs of maintenance and recapitalization projects that would cost at least \$2.6 billion to address, according to Coast Guard information as of 2018.⁸

- The deferred maintenance backlog included more than 5,600 projects, with an estimated cost of \$900 million.

- The recapitalization and new construction backlog had 125 projects, with an estimated cost of at least \$1.77 billion as of 2018.

Further, these costs may be understated, given that the Coast Guard had hundreds of projects without cost estimates. As we found in 2019, the Coast Guard did not have information on the full extent of its capital needs for construction and repairs, such as a description of the resources necessary to fully address all construction and repair needs, including those for medical facilities.⁹ Specifically, our prior work identified actions needed to improve mission execution (e.g., defending the nation’s maritime sovereignty) and resource management (e.g., budget transparency and trade-offs, such as which projects to fund) for shore infrastructure.¹⁰ As of July 2024, the Coast Guard was in various stages of addressing our shore infrastructure recommendations.¹¹

How does the Coast Guard manage its shore infrastructure?

The Coast Guard manages its shore infrastructure, which includes the majority of medical facilities, through facility condition assessments and routine observations used to identify facility needs that range from replacing light bulbs to replacing entire buildings. Coast Guard-wide policy for managing shore infrastructure addresses planning, design, construction, maintenance, and disposal for all shoreside facilities, including medical facilities. The Coast Guard also coordinates recurring, periodic infrastructure condition assessments, called Facility Condition Assessments. The Coast Guard prioritizes shore infrastructure facility maintenance at the local (i.e., the location of a command or unit), regional, and national level depending on the estimated costs associated with maintenance needs it identifies.

In 2019, we found that the Coast Guard faced challenges regarding the non-standardized assessments of shore infrastructure and inconsistencies in the information it collected to identify facility needs.¹² While the Coast Guard subsequently developed a standardized assessment in April 2020, it will not be fully applied to all facilities until around 2028, according to Coast Guard officials. Consequently, as our prior work has shown, the Coast Guard does not have complete information on its shore infrastructure, including regarding its medical facility capital needs and related resource priorities. Once the Coast Guard completes the standardized assessment of all facilities, it will be better positioned to understand overall resource needs, including needs at medical facilities, and develop plans to address them.

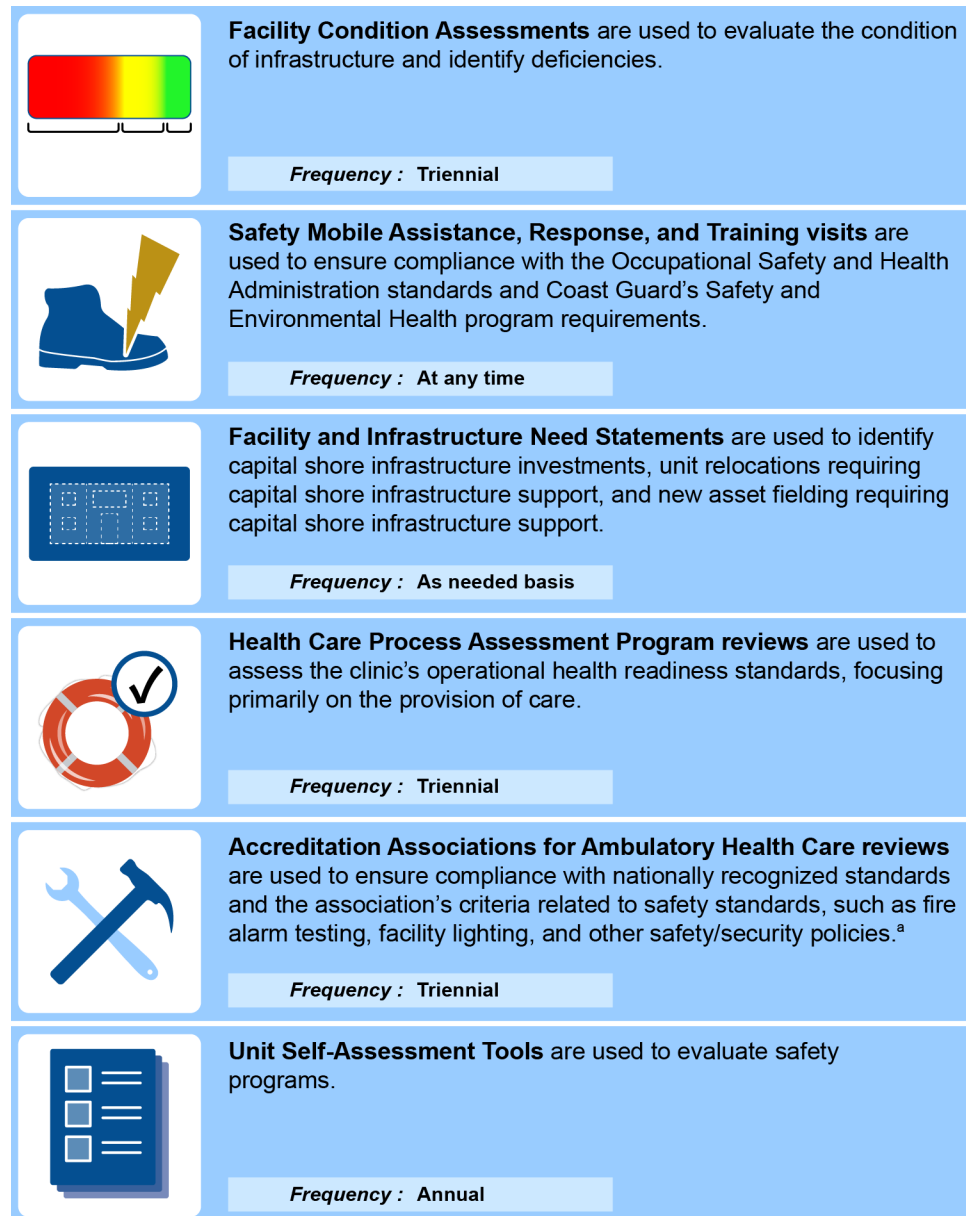
The Coast Guard also identifies shore infrastructure maintenance needs, including for medical facilities, through routine observations by local officials who may identify needs such as moss on a rooftop drain or the need to apply caulk to seal a building. Once a potential maintenance project is identified, either through its standardized assessment or by way of routine observations, the Coast Guard evaluates maintenance and construction priorities at the local, regional, and national level, depending on the estimated costs. For example, the Coast Guard generally addresses maintenance work that is less costly or less complex at the local level. The Coast Guard’s process calls for maintenance and repair work that is more costly or more complex to be elevated to a higher level for prioritization decisions.

Accordingly, multiple offices or entities within the Coast Guard make determinations on maintenance and construction priorities across all projects, including those for medical facilities. These maintenance and construction needs are continually changing among competing priorities and tradeoffs.¹³

How does the Coast Guard assess the condition of its medical facilities?

The Coast Guard assesses ashore medical facilities using six assessments. Two of these assessments are focused on shore infrastructure. The Facility Condition Assessment is used for all shore infrastructure and assigns grades based on facility condition. The Facility and Infrastructure Need Statement identifies capital shore investment needs. The four remaining assessments are designed to primarily focus on issues beyond the physical infrastructure of medical facilities, such as safety, health standards, and patient care, but may identify medical facility issues. Figure 6 provides more information on the different types of assessments for clinics and ashore sickbays.

Figure 6: Types and Frequency of Condition Assessments for Coast Guard’s Clinics and Ashore Sickbays



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Coast Guard documents; GAO icons. | GAO-25-107073

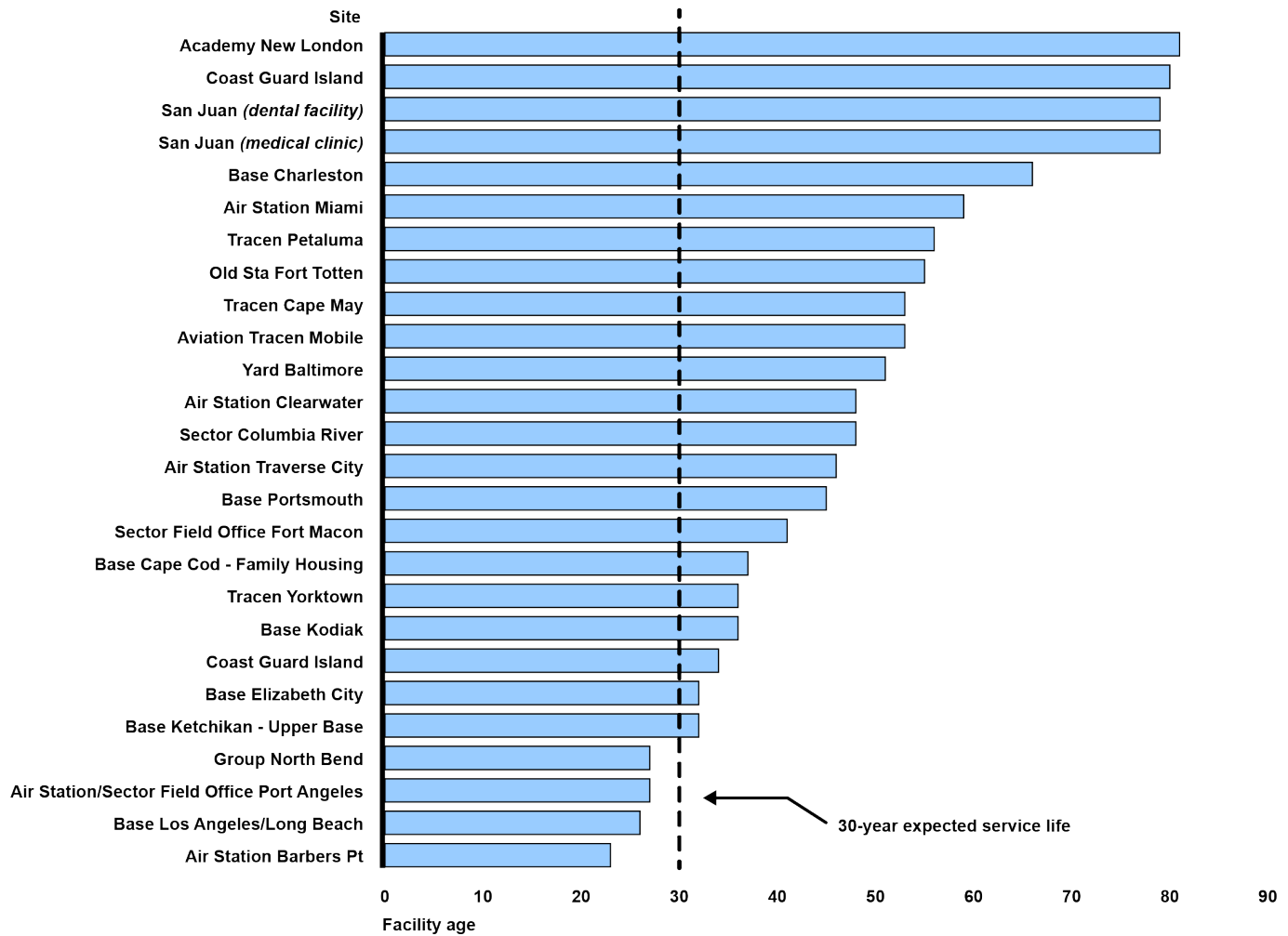
^aThe Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care (AAAHC) is an organization that accredits ambulatory health care facilities. The AAAHC conducts triennial reviews to provide an external and independent assessment of a health care delivery organization against nationally recognized standards, policies, procedures, processes, and outcomes.

For its afloat sickbays, the Coast Guard assesses their condition as part of its broader vessel maintenance process, as our prior work has shown.¹⁴ For example, the Coast Guard uses worklists to identify maintenance issues throughout a vessel, such as problems with corrosion or doors. The Coast Guard also uses Safety Mobile Assistance, Response, and Training visits to ensure compliance with safety standards.

What is the condition of Coast Guard’s medical facilities?

Coast Guard medical facilities are in various conditions, according to Coast Guard officials. For example, the Coast Guard reports that 22 of the 26 facilities with 51 percent or more space dedicated to medical and dental services are beyond their service life and are in various conditions (fig. 7). The Coast Guard constructed these facilities assuming a 30-year service life. Four of the 26 facilities are nearly 80 years old or 50 years past their service life. By 2030, all 26 facilities will be past their service life. The remaining 139 facilities, which generally consist of small spaces, such as a room within a building, are in various conditions depending on the overall age and condition of the buildings in which they are located, according to Coast Guard officials.

Figure 7: Age of the 26 Coast Guard Medical Facilities with a Majority of Space Dedicated to Medical Services, as of July 2024



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Coast Guard documents. | GAO-25-107073

Note: According to the Coast Guard, the Coast Guard’s asset service life ranges from 6 to 75-years, depending on the type of asset. For buildings, the Coast Guard expects a 30-year service life.

How does the Coast Guard manage medical facility maintenance needs?

The Coast Guard manages construction and repair needs for its medical facilities similar to its shore infrastructure described above. Specifically, the Coast Guard prioritizes medical facility maintenance at the local (i.e., the location of a command or unit), regional, and national level depending on the estimated costs and complexity of the associated maintenance needs it identifies. For example, in July 2024, the Coast Guard replaced a leaky boiler at the Base Alameda clinic in California at a local cost of \$12,000 and 160 resource hours (fig. 8).

Figure 8: Example of Coast Guard Maintenance Project



Source: GAO. | GAO-25-107073

For afloat sickbays, the Coast Guard has a broader vessel maintenance process, as our prior work has shown, to track maintenance and repairs by the full vessel and not solely by an afloat sickbay.¹⁵ For example, the Coast Guard uses worklists to identify maintenance issues throughout a vessel, such as problems with corrosion or doors. Therefore, the Coast Guard identifies resource needs for maintenance and construction, including on all types of medical facilities, on a continuous basis through mechanisms such as its Unfunded Priorities Lists, as our prior work has shown.¹⁶

What new medical facilities construction needs has the Coast Guard identified?

The Coast Guard has not built or recapitalized a shore medical facility in over 20 years. As of May 2024, the Coast Guard identified the need for three ashore medical facilities, according to a senior Coast Guard official. These include the construction of a new clinic in Charleston, South Carolina and construction to recapitalize its medical and dental clinics in San Juan, Puerto Rico. For Base Charleston, the Coast Guard's construction of a new medical and dental clinic was part of a larger \$90 million shore infrastructure project that also included road and utility infrastructure, according to Coast Guard officials. The Coast Guard anticipates that it will award a contract in February 2025.

For Base San Juan, the Coast Guard's preliminary cost estimate to construct new medical and dental facilities was \$66 million, according to Coast Guard officials in July 2024. At that time, the Coast Guard anticipated refining the cost estimate as planning was completed. In September 2024, the Coast Guard further revised the status of its planning and stated that the recapitalization of the medical and dental clinics would not occur for another four to eight years,

pending appropriations. The Coast Guard may identify future new facility construction needs beyond routine preventative and general maintenance through its Facility and Infrastructure Need Statement Assessments.

For afloat sickbays, Coast Guard officials told us that the Coast Guard tracks vessel construction needs for the whole vessel and not solely by an afloat sickbay, similar to how it does not track individual rooms for ashore sickbays in buildings. In June 2024, we reported that the Coast Guard plans to spend over \$40 billion to modernize its vessels and aircraft but faces persistent challenges. We also found that the Coast Guard makes short-term budget decisions that obscure the trade-offs needed to balance the long-term affordability of the portfolio of planned investments.¹⁷ Therefore, the Coast Guard identifies resource needs for construction, including on all types of medical facilities, on a continuous basis through mechanisms such as its Unfunded Priorities Lists, as our prior work has shown.¹⁸

What is the Coast Guard's process for constructing the medical facilities?

The Coast Guard's process for constructing ashore medical facilities aligns with how it constructs all shore infrastructure. This process is being updated to include more specific space allocation requirements based on operational and personnel factors, such as medical services to be provided and the number of medical staff to be assigned to various locations, according to Coast Guard officials, as of May 2024.

While the Coast Guard identifies and constructs new clinics and ashore sickbays infrequently, it does so by using a planning board to evaluate national level priorities.¹⁹ This process prioritizes the Coast Guard's projects, generally to be executed within an estimated six to eight years from start to finish, assuming no delays, according to Coast Guard officials in September 2024. However, for over 10 years, we have reported that the Coast Guard's short-term term budget decisions have resulted in a buildup—or bow wave—of near-term unaffordable acquisitions. This bow wave of funding needs negatively affects future acquisitions efforts and potentially affects future operations.²⁰

In June 2023, the Coast Guard established guidance about operational and functional requirements for its clinics, for example, space allocation requirements for each site. As the Coast Guard plans for the construction of new clinics, which it is in the process of planning for in Puerto Rico and Charleston, these documents detail key factors to be incorporated into building the new medical facilities, such as minimum examination room size.

For afloat sickbays, the Coast Guard considers storage for required medical equipment and sickbay space among many factors when designing a ship. The vessel construction process is part of the total vessel acquisition process, according to Coast Guard officials. The Coast Guard manages and oversees its major shipbuilding programs using DHS's acquisition framework, as our prior work has shown.²¹

What is the Coast Guard's process for buying and maintaining medical equipment?

The Coast Guard's process for buying medical equipment depends on the cost of the equipment. For example, units are responsible for funding the purchase of medical equipment valued under \$5,000 for clinics and under \$3,500 for sickbays. Meanwhile, the Health, Safety and Work-Life Service Center—a Coast Guard headquarters office responsible for the implementation of the Health Service Allowance Lists—approves medical equipment valued at \$5,000 or more for clinics and \$3,500 or more for sickbays.

The Health, Safety and Work-Life Service Center has a process for clinic staff to submit medical equipment requests. After receipt of the requests, the Health,

Safety and Work-Life Service Center is to either purchase the equipment, purchase a substituted item, or deny the request with an explanation of the denial, according to Coast Guard policy.

The Coast Guard's process for maintaining medical equipment includes assessing the condition of medical equipment through periodic inspections that are conducted by clinic staff. The Coast Guard conducts other assessments, including Health Care Process Assessment Program and Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care reviews, which focus more on the delivery of care.

Coast Guard officials told us they do not have a backlog of medical equipment requests, as of May 2024. However, medical providers at two clinics described challenges they faced related to medical equipment. For example, some Coast Guard clinic staff told us they did not always request medical equipment because, based on past experiences, they believed their requests for supplies would be denied due to budget factors. Coast Guard personnel at the eight of nine medical facilities we visited told us that they generally could order and receive certain medical supplies such as over-the-counter medicine, oxygen, and bandages, as needed.

Although these Coast Guard clinic staff told us they faced challenges in obtaining some new medical equipment, Coast Guard personnel at all nine medical facilities we visited told us that they ensured individual medical readiness for their active-duty or reserve members. This tendency to "make do" with what it has, according to Coast Guard clinic staff, in terms of medical facilities and equipment, aligns with our past reporting on the Coast Guard and actions needed to improve mission execution and resource management.²²

Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this report to DHS for review and comment. DHS provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate.

How GAO Did This Study

To conduct this work, we reviewed Coast Guard documentation on its overall management of shore infrastructure and its processes for assessing the condition of facilities, including medical facilities. We also reviewed Coast Guard reports, such as the Shore Infrastructure Logistics Center Annual Report, Congressional Budget Justifications, and Unfunded Priorities Lists, as well as our prior work on Coast Guard shore infrastructure. We used these sources to describe how the Coast Guard manages shore infrastructure and previously found challenges, including those applicable to medical facilities.

We also reviewed Coast Guard guidance pertaining to space allocation requirements for medical clinics. We reviewed Coast Guard documentation on the process to maintain and buy medical equipment including its Health Service Allowance Lists and its Medical Manual. To identify whether Coast Guard maintains a backlog of medical equipment upgrades, we reviewed Coast Guard's tracking sheet of medical equipment requests.

To provide information on the service life of Coast Guard medical facilities, we analyzed Coast Guard data identifying 26 facilities having 51 percent or more of the buildings' space dedicated to medical and dental services. We obtained data on the service life of these facilities from the Coast Guard's Shore Asset Management system, a computer database used by the Coast Guard Civil Engineering program to manage and execute its programs. We determined that the data were sufficiently reliable for reporting the service life of these 26 medical facilities by interviewing knowledgeable officials and reviewing relevant documentation, such as standard operating procedures for data entry.

We interviewed Coast Guard headquarters officials to understand the Coast Guard's policies and efforts to assess the condition of its medical facility structures, to manage maintenance and construction needs of its medical facility structures, and to maintain and buy medical equipment, including to identify and evaluate potential challenges. We conducted in-person site visits to a nongeneralizable sample of three Coast Guard sites, including nine medical facilities, to observe medical facility conditions and interview Coast Guard field officials. We selected Coast Guard sites to include multiple types of medical facilities at each location (i.e., clinic, ashore sickbay, and afloat sickbay) and multiple Coast Guard Districts, including sites around Alameda, CA; New Orleans, LA; and Portsmouth, VA. We selected afloat sickbays based on the availability of Coast Guard cutters at these locations.

For these sites, we analyzed the results of the Coast Guard's condition assessments, such as Facility Condition Assessments and worklists, to obtain illustrative examples of facility conditions. For ashore medical facilities, we reviewed recent assessments for each of the three bases we selected, including Base Alameda, CA; Base New Orleans, LA; and Base Portsmouth, VA. For afloat sickbays, we reviewed Coast Guard documentation, such as maintenance requirements for medium and large cutters, and the two most recent assessments for select cutters at Bases Alameda and Portsmouth. The information we obtained was illustrative but not generalizable to all Coast Guard medical facilities.

We conducted this performance audit from September 2023 to October 2024 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.

List of Addressees

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
Chair
The Honorable Ted Cruz
Ranking Member
Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
United States Senate

The Honorable Sam Graves
Chairman
The Honorable Rick Larsen
Ranking Member
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
House of Representatives

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees and the Secretary of Homeland Security. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at <https://www.gao.gov>.

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Endnotes

¹Pub. L. No. 117-263, div. K, tit. CXIV, subtit. B, § 11414, 136 Stat. 2395, 4120.

²Pub. L. No. 107-296, tit. VIII, subtit. H, § 888(a), 116 Stat. 2135, 2249 (classified at

6 U.S.C. § 468(a)) (describing the various missions of the Coast Guard). Coast Guard personnel and their dependents may also obtain medical and dental care through the Department of Defense's (DOD) regional health plan called TRICARE. TRICARE is administered by the DOD's Defense Health Agency. Through TRICARE, Coast Guard beneficiaries can obtain medical care directly from Defense Health Agency hospitals and clinics, referred to as military medical treatment facilities. Additionally, they can obtain medical care through regional networks (East and West) of civilian health care providers who participate in TRICARE.

³The National Security Cutter is the largest and most technologically advanced of the Coast Guard's new cutters with detection and defense capabilities against chemical, biological or radiological attacks as well as drug and migrant interdiction, according to Coast Guard documentation.

⁴GAO, *Coast Guard Health Care: Addition Actions Could Help Ensure Beneficiaries' Access*, [GAO-23-105574](#) (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 4, 2023).

⁵We recommended, among other things, that the Coast Guard implement health care staffing standards for its health services program that account for health care staff deployments, including surge deployments. The Coast Guard is in the process of addressing our recommendation. GAO, *Coast Guard Health Care: Improvements Needed for Determining Staffing Needs and Monitoring Access to Care*, GAO, [GAO-22-105152](#), (Washington, D.C.: Feb 4, 2022).

⁶We have previously reported on the benefits and challenges of the Coast Guard's telehealth program. For instance, as of March 2024 there was not an approved telehealth platform for use aboard Coast Guard vessels at sea. GAO, *Coast Guard Health Care: Information on Telehealth Usage*, [GAO-24-106784](#) (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 10, 2024). Further, during the course of this review, one Coast Guard medical staff told us they had a backlog of patient care appointments due to delays associated with telehealth software, while another reported that the laptops issued to them do not hold a sufficient charge to be used for accessing the Coast Guard's electronic health record when deployed. We have previously found on deficiencies with Coast Guard information technology and operational technology. We recommended, among other things, that the Coast Guard develop network capacity planning policies and procedures that address the leading practices we identified, including identifying traffic growth predictions and continually monitoring the health of the infrastructure to ensure it is meeting demand and mission needs, which the Coast Guard is in various stages of addressing. GAO, *Coast Guard: Actions Needed to Enhance IT Program Implementation*, [GAO-22-105092](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 28, 2022).

⁷GAO, *Coast Guard Shore Infrastructure: Applying Leading Practices Could Help Better Manage Backlog of at Least \$2.6 Billion*, [GAO-19-82](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 21, 2019). *Coast Guard Acquisition: Actions Needed to Address Affordability Challenges*, [GAO-24-107584](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 12, 2024).

⁸The Coast Guard uses its service life expectations to calculate and assign a grade to the infrastructure, which in turn is used to provide the Coast Guard with a broad basis for performance analysis and to consider how well the Coast Guard is able to achieve mission objectives in relation to its dependencies on shore infrastructure. We have not evaluated the extent to which Coast Guard shore infrastructure may have further deteriorated since our 2019 report.

⁹[GAO-19-82](#).

¹⁰GAO, *Coast Guard: Actions Needed to Improve Mission Execution and Resource Management*, [GAO-23-106852](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 21, 2023).

¹¹We recommended, among other things, that the Coast Guard include supporting details about competing project alternatives and report trade-offs in Congressional budget requests and related reports, which according to the Coast Guard, it is in the process of addressing. [GAO-19-82](#).

¹²We recommended, among other things, that the Coast Guard develop a plan with timeframes for standardizing its facility condition assessments, which it completed in April 2020 and is in the process of conducting across all locations, according to the Coast Guard. [GAO-19-82](#).

¹³We recommended, among other things, that the Coast Guard track the effectiveness of maintenance and repair investments and provide feedback on progress made. According to the Coast Guard, the service is in the process of entering data into its system for evaluating and tracking investment decisions, which is a key step toward establishing shore infrastructure baselines, performance goals, and measures. [GAO-19-82](#).

¹⁴GAO, *Coast Guard Cutters: Depot Maintenance Is Affecting Operational Availability and Cost Estimates Should Reflect Actual Expenditures*, [GAO-17-218](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 2, 2017).

¹⁵[GAO-17-218](#).

¹⁶[GAO-19-82](#) and [GAO-24-107584](#).

¹⁷Since 2012, we have made 48 recommendations (16 of which remain open) on how to better manage the Coast Guard's major acquisition programs. We have also made matters for congressional consideration to improve Coast Guard acquisitions. Two of these matters remain open. [GAO-24-107584](#).

¹⁸[GAO-19-82](#) and [GAO-24-107584](#).

¹⁹These boards, which include relevant planners, headquarters program managers, shore asset managers and other representatives who are responsible for evaluating, ranking, and recommending projects to the boards within their specified facility responsibilities. Additional details about the planning boards' processes are described in our 2019 report. We recommended, among other things, that the Coast Guard include supporting details about competing project alternatives and report trade-offs in congressional budget requests and related reports, such as Unfunded Priorities Lists, which according to the Coast Guard, it is in the process of addressing. [GAO-19-82](#).

²⁰GAO, *Coast Guard Acquisitions: Limited Strategic Planning Efforts Pose Risk for Future Acquisitions*, [GAO-17-747T](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 25, 2017); *Coast Guard Recapitalization: Matching Needs and Resources Continue to Strain Acquisition Efforts*, [GAO-17-654T](#) (Washington D.C.: June 7, 2017); [GAO-18-454](#); and [GAO-14-450](#).

²¹GAO, *Coast Guard Acquisitions: Opportunities Exist to Improve Shipbuilding Outcomes*, [GAO-24-107488](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 7, 2024).

²²GAO, *Coast Guard: Actions Needed to Improve Mission Execution and Resource Management*, [GAO-23-106852](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 21, 2023).