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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-06-859](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Veterans' Affairs, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

About one-third of the nation's adult homeless population are veterans, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Many of these veterans have experienced substance abuse, mental illness, or both. The VA's Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem (GPD) program, which is up for reauthorization, provides transitional housing to help veterans prepare for permanent housing. As requested, GAO reviewed (1) VA homeless veterans estimates and the number of transitional housing beds, (2) the extent of collaboration involved in the provision of GPD and related services, and (3) VA's assessment of GPD program performance.

GAO analyzed VA data and methods used for the homeless estimates and performance assessment, and visited selected GPD providers in four states to observe the extent of collaboration.

What GAO Recommends

To further strengthen VA's ability to help homeless veterans, GAO is recommending that VA take steps to ensure policies are understood by providers and staff who implement them. GAO also recommends that VA explore feasible and cost-effective means of obtaining information on long-term outcomes for veterans who leave the GPD programs. VA generally agreed with our findings and recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-859.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Cristina T. Chaplain at (202) 512-7215 or chaplainc@gao.gov.

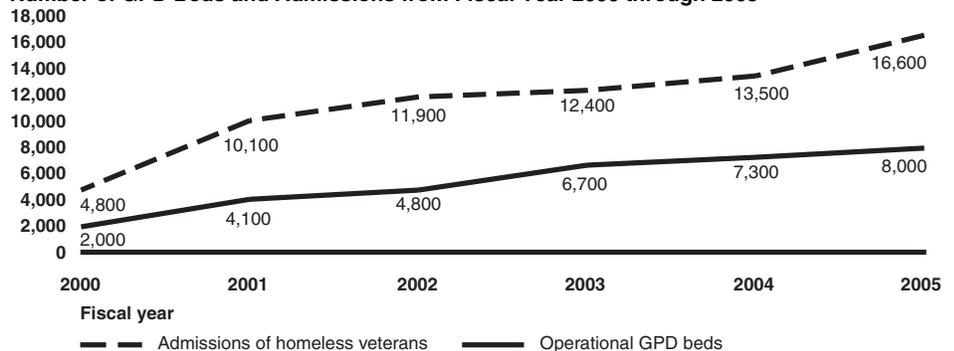
HOMELESS VETERANS PROGRAMS

Improved Communications and Follow-up Could Further Enhance the Grant and Per Diem Program

What GAO Found

VA estimates that on a given night about 194,000 veterans were homeless in 2005. The estimate, generally lower than the numbers reported prior to 2004, is considered by VA officials to be the best available. VA officials believe that its new estimation process and use of better local data have improved the estimate. While VA has increased the capacity of the GPD program over the past several years, VA reports that an additional 9,600 transitional housing beds from various sources are needed to meet current demand. VA has plans to make 2,200 additional GPD beds available.

Number of GPD Beds and Admissions from Fiscal Year 2000 through 2005



Source: GAO analysis of VA data rounded to nearest 100th.

GPD providers collaborate with other agencies to help veterans regain their health and obtain housing, jobs, and various services to enable them to live independently. However, resource and communications gaps may stand in the way of VA and provider efforts to meet these goals. Limited availability of affordable permanent housing, for example, may make it difficult to move veterans out of homelessness, according to GPD providers. We also identified instances of misunderstandings of program policies related to eligibility and program stay limits that could prevent homeless veterans from being admitted into the GPD program.

VA assesses overall program performance by the success of veterans in attaining stable housing, income, and self-determination at the time they leave the program. VA data show that the percentage of veterans achieving these goals has generally increased or held steady over time. In 2006, VA also stepped up its assessment of the performance of GPD providers. While these assessments do not indicate how veterans fare after they leave the program, preliminary results of a onetime VA study indicate positive housing outcomes were maintained 1 year later. However, VA does not routinely collect follow-up data and may not be able to determine how veterans who were not included in the study are faring after they leave the program.