VA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Better Incentives, Workforce Planning, and Performance Reporting Could Improve Program

What GAO Found

By launching the Five-Track Employment Process, VR&E has strengthened its focus on employment, but program incentives have not been updated to reflect this emphasis. VR&E has delineated its services into five tracks to accommodate the different needs of veterans, such as those who need immediate employment as opposed to those who need training to meet their career goal. However, program incentives remain directed toward education and training. Veterans who receive those services collect an allowance, but those who opt exclusively for employment services do not. While VR&E officials said they believed it would be helpful to better align incentives with the employment mission, they have not yet taken steps to address this issue.

VR&E has improved its capacity to provide services by increasing its collaboration with other organizations and by hiring more staff, but it lacks a strategic approach to workforce planning. Although there have been staff increases, many of VR&E’s regional offices still reported staff and skill shortages. The program is not addressing these workforce problems with strategic planning practices that GAO’s prior work has identified as essential. For example, VR&E officials have not fully determined the correct number of staff and the skills they need to serve current and future veterans.

VA does not adequately report program outcomes, which could limit understanding of the program’s performance. Specifically, it reports one overall rehabilitation rate for veterans pursuing employment and those trying to live independently. Computing each group’s success rate for fiscal year 2008, GAO found a lower rate of success for the majority seeking employment and a higher rate of success for the minority seeking independent living than the overall rate. GAO also found that VR&E changed the way it calculates the rehabilitation rate in fiscal year 2006, without acknowledgments in key agency reports. VA noted the change in its fiscal year 2006 performance report, but did not do so for its fiscal year 2007 and 2008 reports, or for its fiscal year 2008 and 2009 budget submissions. Such omissions could lead to misinterpretation of program performance over time.