DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

Medical Conditions and Care for End-of-Service Military Working Dogs

What GAO Found

The Department of Defense (DOD) uses three systems to track information about Military Working Dogs (MWDs), including information related to their removal from service at which time they can be put up for adoption, transferred to a law enforcement agency, or euthanized for health or behavioral reasons. According to an Air Force official, the number of MWDs adopted or transferred over the past 5 years (2011 through 2015) varied based on changes in deployment needs. The number of euthanized MWDs varied to a lesser extent.

Based on medical data available for 421 of 772 MWDs adopted during 2014 and 2015, GAO found that the most prevalent medical conditions included skin and dental issues. An Army veterinarian told GAO that these medical conditions are unlikely to result in MWDs' removal from service as these conditions generally can be treated or resolved. Other prevalent medical conditions, such as arthritis, are associated with musculoskeletal issues, which are more likely to result in MWDs' removal from service. The veterinarian told us these types of musculoskeletal issues are common in breeds maintained by the MWD program, which include Labrador Retrievers, Belgian Malinois, and German Shepherd dogs.

While owners of adopted MWDs are responsible for the costs of veterinary care, some assistance with these costs is available through nonprofit organizations, such as the U.S. War Dogs Association. Individuals with access to DOD medical care—such as active-duty servicemembers and their dependents—may also purchase care for their adopted MWDs at veterinary clinics located at military installations. However, the types of veterinary services vary by installation, and some installations do not offer any veterinary services.