

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-23-104538](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

More than half a million servicemembers are expected to participate in TAP over the next few years. TAP is a mandatory program designed to assist separating servicemembers who may face challenges in choosing a career path, finding employment, or deciding which college to attend. The program was recently tailored to meet individual servicemember needs by assigning them to counseling pathways based on how prepared they are to transition back to civilian life.

The NDAA for Fiscal Year 2019 included a provision for GAO to review the TAP counseling pathways. This report addresses, among other things, the implementation of TAP counseling pathways and transitioning servicemembers' participation in these pathways.

GAO reviewed relevant federal laws, policies, and agency documents and interviewed officials from relevant federal agencies, service branches, and five installations. The installations were selected for diversity in numbers served, location, and service branch. In addition, GAO analyzed the most recent available TAP data, and determined they were sufficiently reliable for active-duty members of the DOD service branches but not DOD reserve component or Coast Guard servicemembers.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making eight recommendations—that the service branches and DOD TAP policy office more fully leverage the performance information they collect to develop and implement plans to improve: (1) 2-day class attendance and (2) TAP timeliness. DOD agreed with the recommendations.

View [GAO-23-104538](#). For more information, contact Dawn G. Locke at (202) 512-7215 or locked@gao.gov.

December 2022

SERVICEMEMBERS TRANSITIONING TO CIVILIAN LIFE

DOD Can Better Leverage Performance Information to Improve Participation in Counseling Pathways

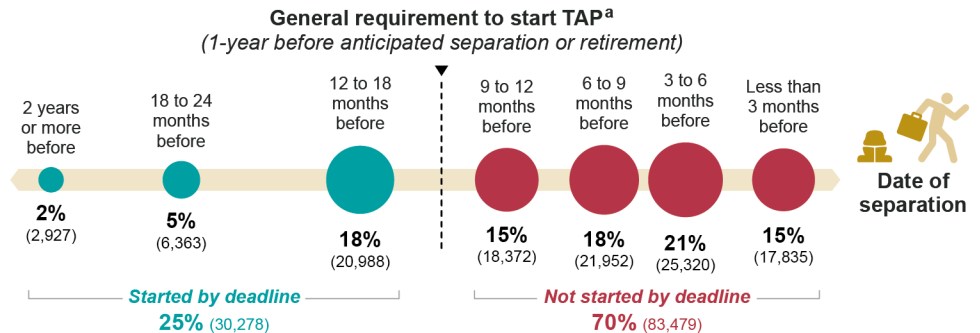
What GAO Found

To improve the Transition Assistance Program (TAP), the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019 (FY 2019 NDAA) includes provisions requiring the service branches to establish counseling pathways, among other actions. GAO found that DOD service branches had fully implemented the TAP counseling pathways. These pathways include a self-assessment, individualized initial counseling, tier assignment that reflects servicemembers' transition preparedness, and a revised core curriculum. Service branch officials, TAP staff, and servicemembers GAO interviewed from selected installations generally expressed positive feedback on the TAP counseling pathways.

Over 90 percent of transitioning servicemembers participated in the TAP counseling pathways, according to GAO's analysis of TAP data from April 1, 2021 to March 31, 2022. In addition, participation in 2-day classes on employment, higher education, vocational training, and entrepreneurship increased. Nonetheless, the service branches waived many servicemembers from attending them. Per service branch policies, servicemembers who need maximum transition support must attend a 2-day class, but GAO found that nearly a quarter of them did not. GAO also found that most servicemembers (70 percent) did not start TAP more than 1 year in advance, as generally required.

The service branches and the TAP policy office collect and review performance information on 2-day class attendance and timeliness. However, they do not fully leverage this information to understand and improve results, inconsistent with leading practices for using performance information. For example, DOD does not use data it collects on servicemembers who start TAP less than 1 year in advance, including why they started late and whether they involuntarily left service for disciplinary reasons. Better understanding root causes would help DOD officials to craft and implement effective corrective action plans and improve servicemembers' ability to benefit from the full range of transition resources available to them.

Time Frames for Starting the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) for DOD Active-Duty Servicemembers Who Left the Military from April 1, 2021 through March 31, 2022



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD) data. | [GAO-23-104538](#)

Note: The 1-year time frame does not apply when servicemembers face an unanticipated separation or retirement or, for reserve component servicemembers, when demobilization makes the time frame unfeasible. Therefore, in some cases the requirement may have been met although the servicemember started TAP less than 1 year before separation or retirement.