

  
**GAO**  
 Accountability Integrity Reliability  
**Highlights**

Highlights of [GAO-03-602](#), a report to the Secretary of Defense

## Why GAO Did This Study

Each year, the Department of Defense (DOD) spends billions of dollars to house unmarried junior enlisted servicemembers, primarily in military barracks. Over the next several years, the Army, Navy, and Air Force plan to spend about \$6 billion to eliminate barracks with multi-person bathroom facilities and provide private sleeping rooms for all permanent party members. Given the cost of the program, GAO looked at (1) the status of efforts to examine the potential for private sector financing, ownership, operation, and maintenance of military barracks; (2) the opportunity to reduce the construction costs of barracks through widespread use of residential construction practices; and (3) whether opportunities exist to make better use of existing barracks.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense promote a coordinated, focused effort to determine the feasibility and cost effectiveness of barracks privatization. GAO also recommends that DOD undertake engineering studies to resolve questions about the use of residential construction practices, issue guidance to direct the maximum use of required existing barracks space, and identify and eliminate any barracks space determined to be excess.

In commenting on a draft of this report, DOD generally agreed with the recommendations. [www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-602](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-602).

To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Barry W. Holman at (202) 512-5581 or [holmanb@gao.gov](mailto:holmanb@gao.gov).

## MILITARY HOUSING

# Opportunities That Should Be Explored to Improve Housing and Reduce Costs for Unmarried Junior Servicemembers

## What GAO Found

GAO found three areas where DOD could potentially reduce costs in its unmarried servicemember housing program:

- DOD and the services have not determined whether “privatization,” or private sector financing, ownership, operation, and maintenance of military barracks is feasible and cost-effective. Barracks privatization involves a number of unique challenges ranging from the funding of privatization contracts to the location of privatized barracks. Recently, each service has independently given increased attention to developing privatization proposals. A collaborative, rather than independent, approach could minimize duplication and optimize lessons learned.
- DOD could reduce the construction costs of government-owned barracks through the widespread use of residential construction practices rather than traditional steel frame, concrete, and cement block. The Army estimated that residential type construction could reduce barracks construction costs by 23 percent or more. However, concerns about barracks durability and unanswered engineering questions have prevented widespread use of these practices.
- DOD’s full use of required existing barracks space could reduce the cost of housing allowances paid to unmarried junior members to live off base in local communities. GAO found that the services have authorized housing allowances for unmarried members to live off base even when existing barracks space was available. This occurred because of lenient barracks utilization guidance, which in some cases does not require full use of existing barracks, and possible noncompliance with guidance. The Air Force could have potentially reduced annual housing allowances by about \$20 million in fiscal year 2002 by fully using available barracks space.

### New Style Barracks at Fort Eustis



Source: GAO.

Newly constructed barracks at Ft. Eustis, Va., feature private sleeping rooms and semi-private bathrooms, improving the servicemember quality of life.