



Highlights of [GAO-05-65](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Veterans' Affairs, House of Representatives

## VA LONG-TERM CARE

# Oversight of Nursing Home Program Impeded by Data Gaps

### Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) operates a \$2.3 billion nursing home program that provides or pays for veterans' care in three settings: VA nursing homes, community nursing homes, and state veterans' nursing homes. The Veterans Millennium Health Care and Benefits Act (Millennium Act) of 1999 and VA policy require that VA provide nursing home care to veterans with a certain eligibility.

The Committee has expressed a need for additional data to conduct oversight of VA's nursing home program. Specifically, for all VA nursing home settings in fiscal year 2003, GAO was asked to report on (1) VA spending to provide or pay for nursing home care, (2) VA workload provided or paid for, (3) the percentage of nursing home care that is long and short stay, and (4) the percentage of veterans receiving care required by the Millennium Act or VA policy.

### What GAO Recommends

To help ensure more complete data for program monitoring and congressional oversight, GAO recommends that VA collect data on veterans' length of stay and eligibility for community nursing homes and state veterans' nursing homes comparable to data VA collects for VA nursing homes. VA stated that it concurred in principle with GAO's recommendations and will work to reduce data gaps GAO identified. However, VA did not indicate specific plans to collect the data GAO recommended.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-65](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-65).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Cynthia A. Bascetta at (202) 512-7101.

### What GAO Found

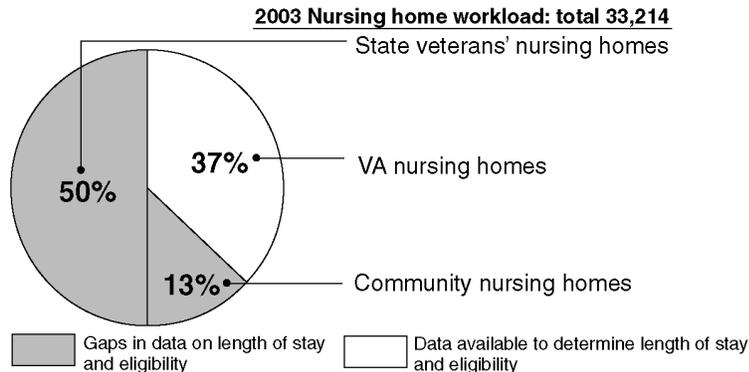
In fiscal year 2003, VA spent 73 percent of its nursing home resources on VA nursing homes—almost \$1.7 billion of about \$2.3 billion—and the remaining 27 percent on community and state veterans' nursing homes.

Half of VA's average daily nursing home workload of 33,214 in fiscal year 2003 was for state veterans' nursing homes, even though this setting accounted for 15 percent of VA's overall nursing home expenditures. In large part, this is because VA pays about one-third of the cost of care in state veterans' nursing homes. Community nursing homes and VA nursing homes accounted for 13 and 37 percent of the workload, respectively.

About one-third of nursing home care in VA nursing homes in fiscal year 2003 was long-stay care (90 days or more). Long-stay services include those needed by veterans who cannot be cared for at home because of severe, chronic physical or mental impairments such as the inability to independently eat or the need for supervision because of dementia. The other two-thirds was short-stay care (less than 90 days), which includes services such as postacute care needed for recuperation from a stroke. VA lacks similar data for community and state veterans' nursing homes.

About one-fourth of veterans who received care in VA nursing homes in fiscal year 2003 were served because the Millennium Act or VA policy requires that VA provide or pay for nursing home care of veterans with a certain eligibility. All other veterans received care at VA's discretion. VA lacks data on comparable eligibility status for community and state veterans' nursing homes even though these settings combined accounted for 63 percent of VA's overall workload. Gaps in data on length of stay and eligibility in these two settings impede program oversight.

**Data Gaps on Length of Stay and Eligibility for VA's Nursing Home Program, Fiscal Year 2003**



Source: GAO analysis of VA data.

Note: The workload measure is average daily census, which represents the total number of days of nursing home care divided by the number of days in the year.