

## Why GAO Did This Study

The approximately 725,000 spouses of active duty servicemembers face challenges to maintaining a career, including having to move frequently. Their employment is often important to the financial well-being of their families. For these reasons, DOD has taken steps in recent years to help military spouses obtain employment. Moreover, the federal government has hiring mechanisms to help military spouses obtain federal jobs.

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2012 requires GAO to report on the programs that help military spouses obtain jobs. This report examines: (1) DOD's recent efforts to help military spouses obtain employment, (2) DOD's steps to assess effectiveness of these efforts, and (3) the hiring mechanisms to help military spouses obtain federal jobs. GAO conducted interviews with DOD, the Office of Personnel Management, and two advocacy groups; conducted site visits; analyzed relevant data; and reviewed relevant documents, laws, and regulations.

## GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD consider incorporating (1) key collaboration practices as it develops its spouse employment guidance, and (2) key attributes of successful performance measures as it develops and finalizes its performance measures. DOD partially concurred with the two recommendations, citing steps it has already taken. GAO recognizes DOD's efforts, but given their preliminary nature, GAO continues to believe DOD would benefit from further incorporating key practices and attributes.

View [GAO-13-60](#). For more information, contact Andrew Sherrill at (202) 512-7215 or [sherrilla@gao.gov](mailto:sherrilla@gao.gov).

# MILITARY SPOUSE EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS

## DOD Can Improve Guidance and Performance Monitoring

### What GAO Found

The Department of Defense (DOD) has recently created three new programs to help military spouses obtain employment: (1) the Military Spouse Career Advancement Accounts (MyCAA) tuition assistance program, (2) the Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP), which connects military spouses with employers, (3) and the Military Spouse Career Center, consisting of a call center and a website for military spouses to obtain counseling and information. DOD's goals for these programs are to reduce unemployment among military spouses and close their wage gap with civilian spouses. Aside from these new programs, military spouses can also use employment assistance programs that the military services have long operated on DOD installations. However, GAO's site visits and interviews indicate that there may be gaps in coordination across the various programs that result in confusion for military spouses. Currently, DOD does not have guidance describing its overall strategy and how all of its programs should coordinate to help military spouses obtain employment, but DOD is in the process of developing such guidance.

DOD is not yet able to measure the overall effectiveness of its military spouse employment programs and its performance monitoring is limited, but DOD is taking steps to improve its monitoring and evaluation. To determine whether its programs have been effective in reducing unemployment among military spouses and closing their wage gap with civilian spouses, DOD is planning to contract with a research organization for a long-term evaluation. With regard to its performance monitoring for these programs, DOD has performance measures for MSEP and MyCAA, but has no measures for the Career Center. In addition, reliability of the data is questionable on the MSEP performance measure because DOD's data are derived from an informal and inconsistent process. DOD's other measure—the percentage of courses funded by MyCAA tuition assistance that military spouses complete with a passing grade—is a useful interim measure for monitoring how the funds are being used, but it does not provide information on whether the funds help military spouses obtain employment. DOD has efforts underway to improve its performance monitoring, including identifying additional measures it would like to track and collecting additional data on participants' employment and educational outcomes.

The federal government has two hiring mechanisms that can provide military spouses who meet the eligibility criteria with some advantages in the federal hiring process. The first mechanism—a non-competitive authority—allows federal agencies the option of hiring qualified military spouses without going through the competitive process. The second mechanism—DOD's Military Spouse Preference program—provides military spouses priority in selection for certain DOD jobs. These hiring mechanisms can increase a military spouse's chances of obtaining federal employment, but they do not guarantee that military spouses will obtain the job they apply for. In fiscal year 2011, agencies used the noncompetitive authority to hire about 1,200 military spouses, which represented approximately 0.5 percent of all federal hires that year. Military spouses represented 0.4 percent of the working-age population in 2010. With regard to the Military Spouse Preference program, DOD has placed about 12,500 military spouses into civil service jobs in the past 10 years, which includes both new hires and conversions of DOD employees.