

Why GAO Did This Study

For over a decade, government, academic, and health professional organizations have projected national shortages of health care professionals, which could adversely affect patients' access to care. However, there is little consensus about the nature and extent of future shortages, partly because of the complexity of creating projections and uncertainty about future health care system changes. Up-to-date workforce estimates are essential given the significant federal investment in health care training programs. Within HHS, HRSA is responsible for monitoring health care workforce adequacy; to do this, HRSA conducts and contracts for workforce studies.

GAO was asked to provide information about health care workforce projections. This report examines the actions HRSA has taken to project the future supply of and demand for physicians, physician assistants, and advanced practice registered nurses since publishing its 2008 report. GAO reviewed HRSA's contract documentation, select delivered products, and timeline goals for publication. GAO also interviewed HRSA officials, workforce researchers, and provider organizations.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Administrator of HRSA expedite the review and publication of HRSA's report on national projections for the primary care workforce, create standard written procedures for report review, and develop tools to monitor report review to ensure timeline goals for publication are met. HHS agreed with GAO's recommendations and provided technical comments.

View [GAO-13-806](#). For more information, contact Kathleen M. King at (202) 512-7114 or kingk@gao.gov.

HEALTH CARE WORKFORCE

HRSA Action Needed to Publish Timely National Supply and Demand Projections

What GAO Found

Since 2008, the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has awarded five contracts to research organizations to update national workforce projections, but HRSA has failed to publish any new reports containing projections. As a result, the most recent projections from HRSA available to Congress and others to inform health care workforce policy decisions are from the agency's 2008 report, which is based on data that are more than a decade old. While HRSA created a timeline for publishing new workforce projection reports in 2012, the agency missed its goal to publish a clinician specialty report by December 2012 projecting the supply of and demand for health care professionals through 2025. HRSA officials attributed the delay in publishing this report to data challenges and modeling limitations. HRSA has also revised its timeline to postpone publication of two other health care workforce reports, as shown in the table below. HRSA officials said that the agency does not have standard written procedures for preparing a report for publication after final reports are delivered from contractors, which may impede its ability to accurately predict how long products will take to review and monitor their progress through the review process.

Health Resources and Services Administration's (HRSA) Original and Revised Timelines for Publishing Updated Workforce Supply and Demand Projections

Report	Description	Original goal for publication	Revised goal for publication
Primary care	Projects supply of and demand for the primary care workforce to 2020.	No goal date	Fall 2013
Clinician specialty	Projects supply of and demand for physicians, physician assistants, and certain advanced practice registered nurses ^a (APRN) to 2025.	December 2012	Summer 2014
Nursing workforce	Projects supply of and demand for nurses, including APRNs, to 2030.	September 2013	Fall 2014
Cross-occupations	Projects supply of and demand for more than 20 health professions to 2030.	2013	2014

Source: GAO review of HRSA information.

^aIncludes nurse practitioners, certified registered nurse anesthetists, and certified nurse-midwives. Clinical nurse specialists are not included.