

## Why GAO Did This Study

Veterans rely on long-term care to address a broad spectrum of needs, from providing occasional help around the house to daily assistance with eating or bathing to round-the-clock clinical care. Veterans' eligibility for this care is primarily based on their service-connected disability status, among other factors.

Congress included a provision in statute for GAO to review VA's long-term care programs. This report (1) describes the use of and spending for VA long-term care and (2) discusses the challenges VA faces in meeting veterans' demand for long-term care and examines VA's plans to address those challenges.

GAO reviewed VA documents, such as strategic planning documents for long-term care programs and analyzed VA utilization and expenditure data for fiscal years 2014 through 2018 (the latest available at the time of the review) and projected data through 2037. GAO also interviewed officials from VA, including officials from VA's GEC, which is responsible for overseeing long-term care programs; and from Veterans Service Organizations.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making three recommendations, including that VA develop measurable goals for its efforts to address key challenges in meeting the demand for long-term care. VA concurred with GAO's recommendations and identified actions it will take to implement them.

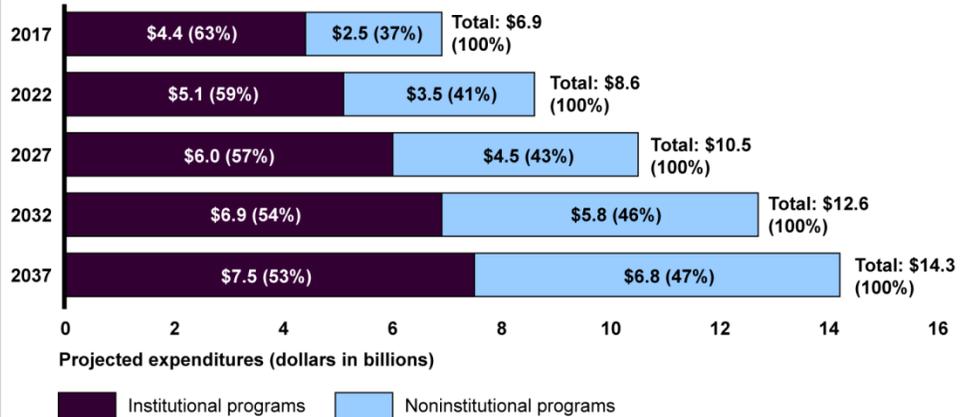
# VA HEALTH CARE

## Veterans' Use of Long-Term Care Is Increasing, and VA Faces Challenges in Meeting the Demand

### What GAO Found

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides or purchases long-term care for eligible veterans through 14 long-term care programs in institutional settings like nursing homes and noninstitutional settings like veterans' homes. From fiscal years 2014 through 2018, VA data show that the number of veterans receiving long-term care in these programs increased 14 percent (from 464,071 to 530,327 veterans), and obligations for the programs increased 33 percent (from \$6.8 to \$9.1 billion). VA projects demand for long-term care will continue to increase, driven in part by growing numbers of aging veterans and veterans with service-connected disabilities. Expenditures for long-term care are projected to double by 2037, as shown below. According to VA officials, VA plans to expand veterans' access to noninstitutional programs, when appropriate, to prevent or delay nursing home care and to reduce costs.

**VA Projections for Long-Term Care Expenditures, Fiscal Years 2017 through 2037**  
Fiscal year



Source: GAO analysis of projected VA expenditure data. | [GAO-20-284](#)

Note: These long-term care programs include those VA projects using its Enrollee Health Care Projection Model. This model includes 12 of VA's 14 Long-Term Services and Supports programs, excluding State Veterans Homes and State Home Adult Day Health Care.

VA currently faces three key challenges meeting the growing demand for long-term care: workforce shortages, geographic alignment of care (particularly for veterans in rural areas), and difficulty meeting veterans' needs for specialty care. VA's Geriatrics and Extended Care office (GEC) recognizes these challenges and has developed some plans to address them. However, GEC has not established measurable goals for these efforts, such as specific staffing targets for programs with waitlists or specific targets for providing telehealth to veterans in rural areas. Without measurable goals, VA is limited in its ability to address the challenges it faces meeting veterans' long-term care needs.