

# GAO@100 Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-21-450](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

VA offers education benefits to veterans with disabilities through the GI Bill, VA's largest education program, and VR&E, which helps veterans with service-connected disabilities re-enter the workforce. Each offers distinct features that may better serve veterans depending on their individual circumstances. However, veterans with disabilities may not know that VR&E can help pay for education as part of its employment services. GAO was asked to what extent eligible veterans are aware of the comparative features of the programs.

This report examines (1) the reported factors that influence whether veterans with disabilities select the Post-9/11 GI Bill or VR&E, and (2) how VA informs veterans with disabilities about the education benefits available to them from each program, and the effectiveness of those efforts.

For both programs, GAO reviewed relevant federal laws; analyzed participant data; conducted semi-structured interviews with officials from schools and VSOs selected for their depth of knowledge about veteran affairs, and reviewed relevant VA informational materials.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making two recommendations to VA to take steps to 1) provide veterans with more information about VR&E's education benefits and 2) inform veterans about the comparative program features of the GI Bill and VR&E. VA concurred with the recommendations.

View [GAO-21-450](#). For more information, contact Elizabeth Curda at (202) 512-7215 or [curdae@gao.gov](mailto:curdae@gao.gov).

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## VETERANS WITH DISABILITIES

### VA Could Better Inform Veterans with Disabilities about Their Education Benefit Options

## What GAO Found

Most school and veteran service organization (VSO) officials GAO interviewed stated that when given the choice between the Post 9/11 GI Bill (GI Bill) and the Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) program, veterans with disabilities will base their choice on which program best suits their unique goals, preferences, and circumstances. For example, certain veterans may prefer the GI Bill's flexibility to independently select courses of study, whereas others may prefer to have the assistance of a counselor to select a course of study as part of an employment plan, as provided under VR&E. However, most officials GAO interviewed said veterans with disabilities often use the GI Bill for education benefits without knowing that the VR&E program exists, or that it can pay for education, provide assistive equipment for their disability, or offer unique benefits of working with a counselor.

#### Selected Comments Regarding the Post-9/11 GI Bill and Veteran Readiness & Employment Programs

"Had I known about VR&E I would have [used it.]"	-Veteran with disabilities
"I often think of VR&E as sort of a hidden program when it comes to education benefits."	-VSO official
"Veterans with disabilities are often not aware of the differences between the two programs."	-School official

Source: GAO survey of veterans and GAO interviews with school and VSO officials | GAO-21-450

VA provides information about education benefits to veterans with disabilities through various methods, including in-person communication, online materials, and written communications. However, on the agency website, [VA.gov](http://VA.gov), few webpages devoted to VR&E explicitly mention that it can help pay for a college degree. In addition, the letters that VA sends to veterans when they receive their disability rating do not specifically mention that VR&E can cover education costs for a college degree. VA's online GI Bill Comparison Tool allows veterans to learn more about the tuition amounts each program will cover for certain schools, but it does not inform veterans on the key differences in program features across the programs. Most school and VSO officials GAO interviewed said VA's efforts do not adequately inform veterans with disabilities about their potential education benefit options, as evidenced by the number of veterans with disabilities they encounter who are unaware that VR&E exists or who do not fully understand the benefits VR&E can provide. Including more information about how VR&E can help veterans pay for higher education, and facilitating direct comparison between the features of the GI Bill and VR&E, would help better position veterans with disabilities to choose the program that best meets their needs.