

GAO@100 Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-22-103850](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

The VHA allows eligible veterans to receive care from community providers through VA's VCCP when veterans face challenges accessing care at VA medical facilities. VHA is responsible for ensuring VCCP providers are qualified and competent to provide safe care to veterans based on the eligibility requirements and restrictions.

GAO was asked to examine the extent to which vulnerabilities in VCCP provider eligibility controls contributed to potentially ineligible providers participating in the program.

GAO reviewed VHA and contractor standard operating procedures, policies, and guidance. GAO also interviewed knowledgeable officials. To identify potentially ineligible providers, GAO compared data from VHA's Office of Community Care to data sources related to actions that may exclude providers from participating in the VCCP.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making ten recommendations to VA, including that VA enhance existing controls, consistently implement controls as described in standard operating procedures, and assess the fraud risk of invalid provider address data. VA generally agreed with GAO's ten recommendations.

View [GAO-22-103850](#). For more information, contact Seto Bagdoyan at (202) 512-6722 or bagdoyans@gao.gov or Sharon M. Silas at (202) 512-7114 or silass@gao.gov.

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VETERANS COMMUNITY CARE PROGRAM

VA Should Strengthen Its Ability to Identify Ineligible Health Care Providers

What GAO Found

GAO found vulnerabilities in the controls used by the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and its contractors to identify health care providers who are not eligible to participate in the Veterans Community Care Program (VCCP), resulting in the inclusion of potentially ineligible providers.

Examples of Requirements of and Restrictions on Veterans Community Care Program Provider Eligibility

Providers must



Have an active, unrestricted medical license in the state in which services will be provided



Certify that no state has terminated a license, registration, or certification for cause

Providers must not



Be excluded from participation in a federal health care program



Be convicted of a felony or other serious state or federal offense

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Veterans Affairs information. | [GAO-22-103850](#)

Of over 800,000 providers assessed, GAO identified approximately 1,600 VCCP providers who were deceased, were ineligible to work with the federal government, or had revoked or suspended medical licenses. VHA and its contractors had controls in place to identify such providers. However, the existing controls missed some providers who could have been identified with enhanced controls and more consistent implementation of standard operating procedures. For example, GAO found the following:

- One provider had an expired nursing license in April 2016 and was arrested for assault in October 2018. This provider was excluded from working in federally funded health care programs. The provider was convicted of patient abuse and neglect in July 2019. The provider entered the VCCP in November 2019. VHA officials stated that this provider was uploaded into the system in error.
- One provider was eligible for referrals in the VHA system, but his medical license had been revoked in 2019. Licensing documents stated that the provider posed a clear and immediate danger to public health and safety.

GAO also identified weaknesses in oversight of provider address data. Some VCCP providers used commercial mail receiving addresses as their only service address. Such addresses have been disguised as business addresses in the past by individuals intending to commit fraud. VHA has not assessed the fraud risk that invalid address data pose to the program.

These vulnerabilities potentially put veterans at risk of receiving care from unqualified providers. Additionally, VHA is at risk of fraudulent activity, as some of the providers GAO identified had previous convictions of health-care fraud. VA has an opportunity to address these limitations as it continues to refine the controls, policies, and procedures for this 2-year old program.