

Why GAO Did This Study

To help personnel balance work and family life, the Coast Guard provides child care programs—both on-base and in communities where their personnel live—similar to those offered through DOD. Military families, like others, struggle to find child care for a variety of reasons, such as a limited number of providers and the high cost of care.

The William M. (Mac) Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 includes a provision for GAO to report on child care and school-age care programs available to qualified Coast Guard families and how these compare to DOD’s programs.

This report examines how the Coast Guard (1) compares to DOD in providing access to child care for its personnel, and (2) is working to increase access to quality child care through its programs.

GAO analyzed data from the Coast Guard’s and DOD’s child care programs, including Fee Assistance program data from March 2022 (the most recent available) and Child Development Center and Family Child Care data from 2019 (for consistency with data previously reported by DOD). GAO also reviewed agency documentation and interviewed agency officials.

View [GAO-22-105262](#). For more information, contact Kathryn A. Larin at (202) 512-7215 or larink@gao.gov.

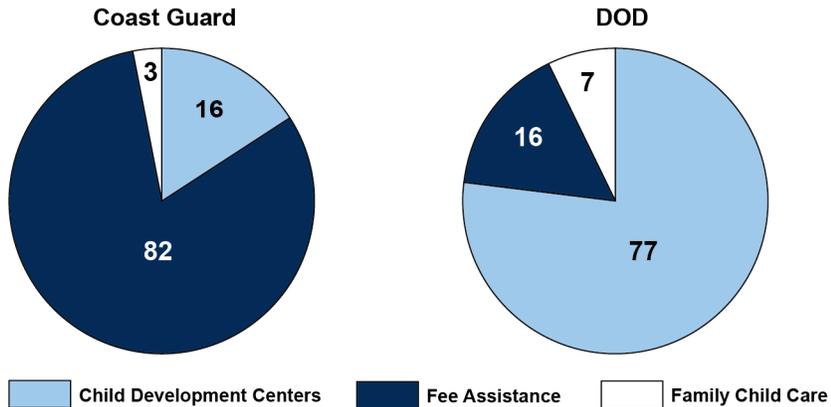
MILITARY CHILD CARE

Coast Guard is Taking Steps to Increase Access for Families

What GAO Found

Compared to the Department of Defense (DOD), the U.S. Coast Guard (Coast Guard) operates proportionally fewer on-base child development centers, so most eligible Coast Guard personnel receive fee assistance to help them obtain child care through community-based providers. According to GAO’s analysis of agency data, the Coast Guard serves 82 percent of enrolled children through community-based providers who participate in its Fee Assistance program. In contrast, DOD serves 77 percent of enrolled children in its on-base child development centers (see figure). Most DOD and Coast Guard child development centers have waitlists and as of March 2022, the Coast Guard and DOD reported having 361 and 14,034 children, respectively, on waitlists; most of these children were infants and toddlers. Families enrolled in Fee Assistance programs, like many families seeking child care, may face challenges obtaining care when there are limited spaces available at community-based providers in their area. A third, less-used program that DOD and Coast Guard offer is the Family Child Care program in which military families provide in-home child care to their children and children of other military families.

Percentage of Enrolled Children by Type of Coast Guard and Department of Defense (DOD) Child Care Programs



Source: GAO analysis and summary of Coast Guard and DOD data. | GAO-22-105262

Note: Due to rounding, the percentage of children enrolled in Coast Guard programs adds up to more than 100 percent. Child Development Center data are from 2019 and include children in school-age programs. Fee Assistance data are from 2022, and Family Child Care data are from 2019. Because of the disruption that the COVID-19 pandemic had on child care services and programs in 2020, GAO did not review data from that year.

The Coast Guard is working to increase access to quality child care by planning facility improvements and centralizing information for families. In a March 2022 report to Congress, the Coast Guard stated that it plans to build four new child development centers and to renovate existing ones, which will provide access to on-base child care for more families. The Coast Guard has also centralized and updated online information to help families find child care in their communities. In addition, the Coast Guard increased Fee Assistance subsidy amounts to help make child care more affordable, especially for families who live in high-cost areas.