

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-23-105617](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

VHA operates the largest health care delivery system in the United States, providing health care to 6.4 million veterans in fiscal year 2021. In the last decade, Congress has taken steps to expand the ability for eligible veterans to receive care from community providers, such as when they cannot access care in a timely manner from VHA directly. GAO and others have previously identified challenges VHA has had in scheduling appointments in a timely manner. The Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020 included requirements for VHA related to appointment scheduling and related oversight and training. It also includes a provision for GAO to review VHA's efforts.

This report, among other objectives, describes VHA's updated specialty care scheduling process; examines VHA's scheduling timeliness standards; and examines VHA's efforts to provide training on the updated scheduling process. GAO reviewed VHA documentation on the scheduling process and scheduling timeliness data for the third quarter of fiscal year 2022, the most recent data available. GAO also interviewed VHA officials and officials at six VA medical centers that were randomly selected based on facility complexity and geography.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making three recommendations, including that VHA conduct a comprehensive analysis of scheduling timeliness data from all VA medical centers and require training. VA concurred with the recommendations and identified steps it would take to implement them.

View [GAO-23-105617](#). For more information, contact Sharon M. Silas at (202) 512-7114 or SilasS@gao.gov.

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VETERANS HEALTH CARE

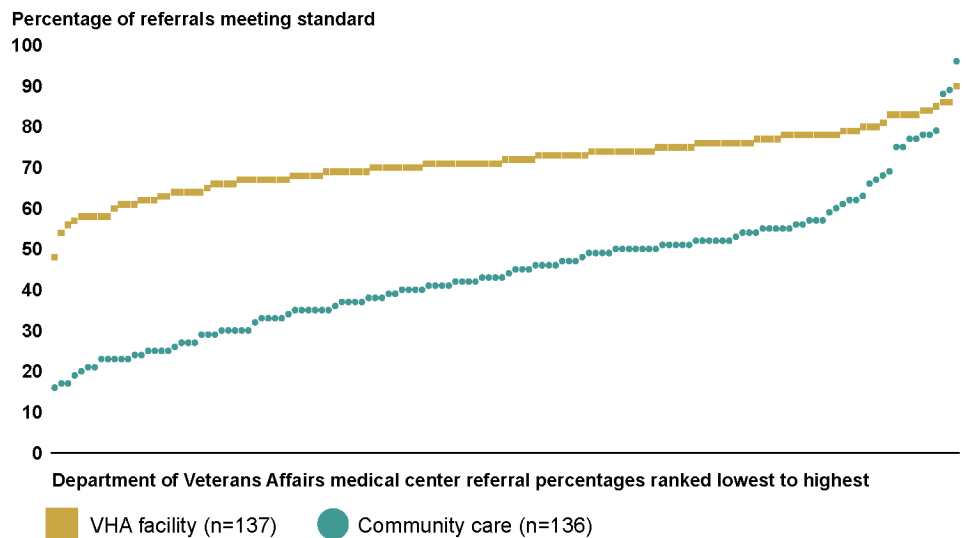
VA Actions Needed to Ensure Timely Scheduling of Specialty Care Appointments

What GAO Found

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) updated its process for scheduling specialty care appointments in 2020. This included both appointments at VHA facilities and with providers in the community. Under VHA's updated process, referral coordination teams at each VA medical center review referrals for specialty care, such as mental health treatment or cardiology, and discuss care options with veterans.

According to the timeliness standards that VHA has established for specialty care appointment scheduling, appointments at VHA facilities must be scheduled within 3 business days from the date a VHA provider enters a referral and community care appointments must be scheduled within 7 days. VHA data from the third quarter of fiscal year 2022 indicate that VA medical centers performed better scheduling timely referrals for VHA facility appointments than community care. VHA officials said they are considering reexamining the community care standard. VHA's limited analysis on scheduling timeliness that VHA officials conducted in 2021 lacked information for the current standard. Conducting a comprehensive analysis of scheduling timeliness data from all VA medical centers could help VHA determine whether the community care standard is achievable or adjustments to the standard or scheduling process are needed.

Percentage of Referrals Meeting Timeliness Standards by Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Third Quarter Fiscal Year 2022



Source: GAO analysis of Veterans Health Administration (VHA) data. | GAO-23-105617

In May 2022, VHA developed training materials on the updated scheduling process for both the providers who enter referrals and those who review them for the referral coordination team. However, VHA does not require this training. Doing so would help ensure that providers have the information needed to perform their duties and help ensure veterans' timely access to care.