

Highlights of [GAO-25-106910](#), a report to congressional committees.

Why This Matters

Increasingly, veterans seeking health care have been referred by Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical centers to community providers outside VA. The quality of the care those veterans receive can be affected by how successfully community and VA providers exchange medical records, as well as community providers' ability to understand the unique needs of veterans.

GAO Key Takeaways

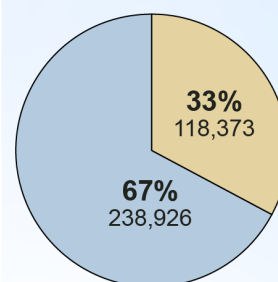
Veterans used over 350,000 referrals to receive behavioral health services (e.g., psychotherapy for depression) from community providers in fiscal years 2021 through 2023. Many veterans who were cared for by community providers later returned to VA medical centers for further care. To coordinate this care, community providers must send medical documentation (e.g., diagnoses, prescriptions, progress notes) to VA after the veteran's initial and final visits for each referral.

VA does not monitor whether these medical record exchanges are completed across all medical centers. But we found that 33 percent of these referrals were missing records for initial visits, when we reviewed the data that VA has readily available. Further, no such data are available for final visits, so the extent to which those exchanges are completed is unknown.

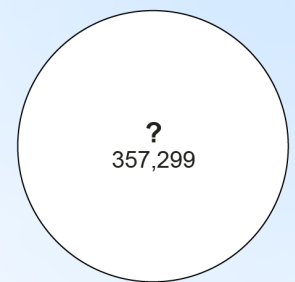
Likewise, VA is not monitoring the extent to which community providers complete any of eight core trainings on opioid safety, suicide prevention, and other veteran-centric topics. We found that about 2 percent of the community providers with a behavioral health referral from fiscal years 2021 through 2023 had completed one or more of these trainings.

Medical Records for Behavioral Health Referrals, Fiscal Years 2021 Through 2023

Initial visit for each referral



Final visit for each referral



Records were exchanged



Records were missing



Unknown - no data available

Source: GAO analysis of Veterans Health Administration data (data); GAO (icons). | GAO-25-106910

How GAO Did This Study

We analyzed VA data on its behavioral health referrals from fiscal years 2021 through 2023 and community providers' completion of core trainings. We reviewed VA's medical record exchange guidance, and interviewed VA officials, staff from five VA medical centers, and representatives from three veteran service organizations.

What GAO Recommends

We are making five recommendations to VA, including for it to establish goals and performance measures and monitor the extent to which medical documentation exchanges and core community provider trainings have been completed.

VA concurred with one recommendation and concurred in principle with the other four recommendations, as discussed in the report.

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