

A report to congressional committees

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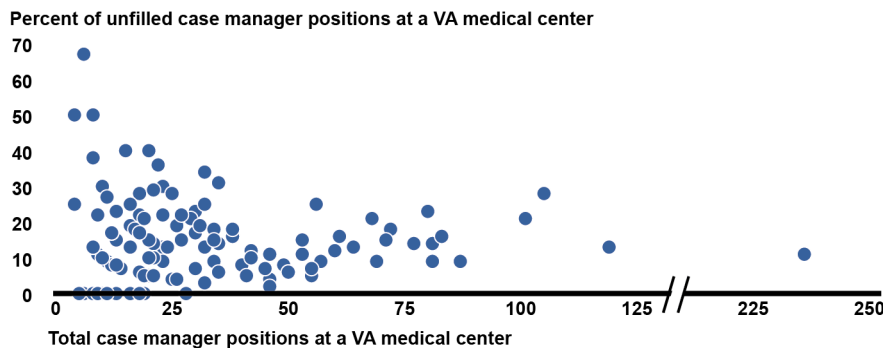
What GAO Found

The Departments of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Veterans Affairs (VA) jointly operate the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program. Veterans experiencing homelessness receive HUD housing vouchers and VA case management delivered through local VA medical centers.

VA has faced challenges hiring and retaining enough case managers. In fiscal year 2024, more than one-quarter of medical centers with two or more case managers had at least 20 percent of these positions unfilled (see figure). Factors contributing to vacancies included staff burnout and turnover. GAO analysis of VA data shows that annual case manager turnover ranged from 20 percent to 26 percent in fiscal years 2020–2024. Stakeholders at all eight sites GAO visited described periods of high turnover and persistent vacancies. The effects of insufficient staffing include reduced services for veterans and delays in admitting new participants.

HUD-VASH Case Manager Staffing Levels in Fiscal Year 2024, by VA Medical Center

Each dot represents a VA medical center’s staffing level for the Housing and Urban Development-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program.



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) data. | GAO-26-107517

VA has taken steps to improve case manager hiring but has not consistently collected data on reasons that prevented veterans from entering HUD-VASH. Of 174,045 instances of veterans not being referred to the program in 2020–2024, VA did not document the reason in 151,296 (87 percent), according to GAO’s analysis. With more complete data on the reasons, VA could better assess its unmet need, adjust hiring strategies, and allocate case managers accordingly. VA then would be better positioned to serve more veterans.

HUD launched the Tribal HUD-VASH pilot program in fiscal year 2016 to test a new approach to serving American Indian/Alaska Native veterans and had served over 1,100 veterans as of April 2025, according to HUD. HUD’s program design aligns to some extent with leading practices GAO identified in prior work. For example, HUD communicated with stakeholders at all stages of the program. But HUD has not clearly defined the program’s objectives or how it will measure progress toward them. HUD also has not implemented an evaluation plan. By fully incorporating leading practices, HUD could help ensure it has the information needed to make informed decisions about the program.

Why GAO Did This Study

HUD estimated that 32,882 veterans experienced homelessness on a single night in January 2024. Some policymakers note that this population faces significant barriers, including high housing costs. The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 includes a provision for GAO to review VA case management and the availability of affordable housing for veterans experiencing homelessness. This report examines, among other things, challenges reported by VA staff and stakeholders related to (1) hiring and retaining case managers for HUD-VASH, and (2) implementing Tribal HUD-VASH.

GAO analyzed data on HUD-VASH case managers for fiscal years 2020–2024; reviewed VA and HUD policies and guidance; and reviewed HUD documentation on the Tribal HUD-VASH program. GAO interviewed officials from VA and HUD and housing and service providers at eight sites GAO visited (selected for geographic diversity and prevalence of veteran homelessness).

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that VA collect comprehensive data on the reasons veterans are not referred to HUD-VASH and take appropriate corrective actions. GAO also recommends that HUD clearly define measurable objectives and develop and implement a data analysis plan to evaluate Tribal HUD-VASH. VA agreed with the recommendation. HUD did not agree or disagree but indicated it would take actions to implement the recommendation.