

A report to congressional requesters.

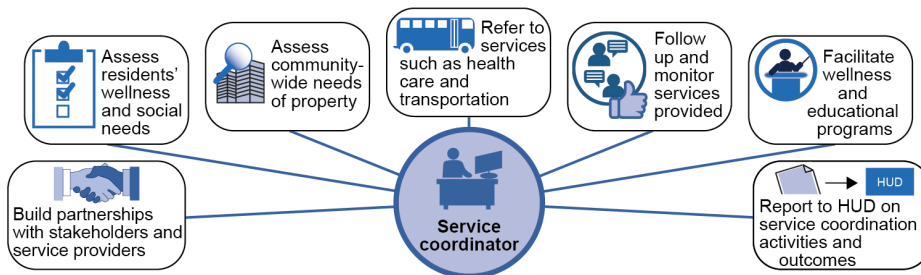
For more information, contact: Alicia Puenta Cackley at cackleya@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

Service coordinators employed by owners or managers of affordable housing link residents to supportive services, such as health care, meals, and transportation. Comprehensive data on service coordinators in rural federally assisted housing are not available. Some agencies, including the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Internal Revenue Service, support rental properties that may employ service coordinators. But they do not administer service coordinator programs, so they do not collect service coordinator data. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) operates two programs that fund and collect data on service coordinators in public housing and in privately owned multifamily housing. However, GAO found weaknesses in the quality and use of HUD's data for the multifamily housing program:

- HUD has not developed uniformly applied procedures for entering data in its IT system on multifamily properties that fund service coordinators. As a result, HUD cannot accurately determine how many properties have service coordinators or whether these properties comply with program requirements.
- HUD does not routinely analyze performance reports it requires service coordinators at multifamily properties to prepare. Doing so could help HUD assess program effectiveness.

Tasks of HUD-Funded Service Coordinators



Source: GAO analysis of documents from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and icons. | GAO-26-107802

Stakeholders that GAO interviewed reported that service coordinators in federally assisted housing benefit residents' well-being, and selected studies reported varied effects. For example, during GAO's site visits to four rural locations, local stakeholders said service coordinators helped residents avoid eviction and apply for Medicaid. Four of the five studies GAO reviewed that measured potential effects of service coordination reported mixed results on certain resident health, financial, or housing outcomes.

According to selected stakeholders and researchers GAO interviewed, key challenges to service coordination in rural areas include managing multiple funding sources, limited service providers, and long distances between properties and services. They also described ways they have tailored efforts to meet these challenges, such as by inviting service providers to meet residents at the properties. Federal agencies also have taken some actions that may help address certain rural service coordination challenges. For example, one of HUD's programs allows participating housing providers to use some grant funds to directly provide services to residents (e.g., on-site financial literacy classes).

Why GAO Did This Study

The federal government supports the development or operation of rural affordable rental housing through several agencies. Some residents of federally assisted housing may need supportive services to remain independent and in their homes. Rural populations may face a greater need for these services because they generally have higher percentages of older adults and people with disabilities than their urban counterparts.

This report examines (1) the availability and quality of data on service coordinators in rural federally assisted housing, (2) available evidence of their effect on residents' well-being, and (3) any challenges to rural service coordination and approaches to address them.

GAO reviewed HUD's collection and use of service coordinator data, including data entry procedures, and reviewed selected studies on the effect of service coordinators. GAO also interviewed or received written responses from researchers and officials of four federal agencies that support rural housing or supportive services and conducted site visits to four geographically diverse rural areas to interview local service coordinators and stakeholders.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that HUD (1) develop and use uniform procedures for entering data on multifamily properties that fund service coordinators and (2) establish a process for using service coordinator performance information to analyze program outcomes for multifamily properties. HUD had no comments on the recommendations.