HEALTH RESOURCES AND SERVICES ADMINISTRATION

Many Underserved Areas Lack a Health Center Site, and the Health Center Program Needs More Oversight

What GAO Found

Grant awards for new health center sites in 2007 reduced the overall percentage of MUAs lacking a health center site from 47 percent in 2006 to 43 percent in 2007. In addition, GAO found wide geographic variation in the percentage of MUAs that lacked a health center site in both years. Most of the 2007 nationwide decline in the number of MUAs that lacked a site occurred in the South census region, in large part, because half of all awards made in 2007 for new health center sites were granted to the South census region. GAO also found that HRSA lacks readily available data on the services provided at individual health centers.

Percentages of MUAs That Lacked a Health Center Site, by Census Region, 2006 and 2007

HRSA oversees training and TA cooperative agreement recipients, but its oversight is limited in key respects and it does not always provide clear feedback to unsuccessful grant applicants. HRSA oversees recipient activities that support the Health Center Program’s goals with comparable measures. In addition, without timely comprehensive on-site reviews of these recipients every 3 to 5 years, the lack of standardized performance measures limits HRSA’s ability to effectively evaluate cooperative agreement recipients’ activities that support the Health Center Program’s goals with comparable measures. Moreover, more than a third of the written feedback HRSA sent to unsuccessful Health Center Program grant applicants in fiscal years 2005 and 2007 contained unclear statements. The lack of clarity in this written feedback may undermine its usefulness rather than enhance the ability of applicants to successfully compete for grants in the future.