



NATIONAL COALITION *for* HOMELESS VETERANS

Veterans' Employment and Training: Better Targeting, Coordinating, and Reporting Needed to Enhance Program Effectiveness

Government Accountability Office (GAO) | [Full Report](#)

Quick Takeaways

- To ensure government resources are used efficiently, the Secretaries of Labor, VA, and DoD should incorporate DoD's employment assistance initiatives into the agreements that guide interagency coordination.
- To enhance transparency and accountability for achieving results, the Secretary of Labor should consistently report both performance goals and associated performance outcomes for each of its veterans' employment and training programs.
- To assess veterans' employment programs' effectiveness, Secretaries of Labor and VA should, to the extent possible, determine the extent to which veterans' employment outcomes result from program participation or are the result of other factors.
- Labor should ensure that DVOP's provide veterans who have significant barriers to employment with the array of intensive services they need to succeed.
- Labor should focus LVER's time on cultivating relationships with employers in the community.
- Labor should ensure that the rest of the staff at federally funded American Job Centers across the country understands their responsibility to veterans.

Introduction

This GAO report set out to examine three things:

- the extent to which federal veterans' employment and training programs vary in terms of the services they deliver and the veterans who receive them,
- the extent to which federal agencies coordinate these programs, and
- what is known about the performance of these programs.

Veterans' employment outcomes for programs administered by both Labor and VA have generally not regained levels seen before the recession that began in 2007, which is similar to employment programs for the general population. Among the six federal veterans' employment and training programs¹, the Department of Labor's (Labor) Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) has the greatest potential for overlap with other veterans' programs and Labor's employment programs for the general population. While DVOPs are supposed to provide highest priority to veterans who are disabled or economically and educationally disadvantaged, Labor does not provide states criteria for prioritizing services.

The law also generally requires that program staff provide participants with intensive services (e.g., individual employment plans), but Labor's data indicate that nationally 28 percent of participants received such services in 2011. To mitigate this issue, Labor plans to develop guidance on prioritizing services, and it also has a six-state pilot to improve monitoring – neither of these efforts has been completed.

DVOP Priorities

Two main issues are highlighted that affect the consistency of targeting for DVOP. The first is whether determinations of which veterans should receive priority are consistent. Staff has flexibility in how to make this determination; however, local one-stop staff makes the final decision about who is served. Secondly, all veterans, regardless of priority, may want to use the program and program staff may want to serve veterans regardless of priority. Below is a chart outlining the various priority and target groups for DVOP staff in the six states GAO examined.

¹ Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program, Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program, Local Veterans' Employment Representative Program, Transition Assistance Program, Veterans' Workforce Investment Program, and Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment Program

Summary of Priority and Target Groups for Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program in Selected States in GAO Review

Target Groups	FL	MA	OH	OR	TX	VA
Service-connected disability	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Disabled veterans	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Economically and educationally disadvantaged		Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
Homeless	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Guard and reserve	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		
Wounded service members	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Transitioning service members	Yes		Yes		Yes	Yes
Women		Yes		Yes		Yes
Minorities		Yes				Yes
Incarcerated/felony convicted	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		
Older	Yes	Yes	Yes			
Rural	Yes	Yes	Yes			
Recently separated		Yes				
Other eligible veterans				Yes		Yes

In a December 2009 HVRP report, the most common characteristics of program participants with positive employment outcomes included motivation; having a history of success such as relevant skills or experience; and having a support system.

Incorporating labor market information into participants' rehabilitation plans served as one recommendation to improve job placement for DVOP staff. GAO also recommended clear guidance to states on how to prioritize service and additional monitoring of their implantation of such guidance.

Employment Handbook

In 2008, Labor and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) compiled a handbook intended to guide the roles of their respective staff in coordinating services to disabled veterans; however, they have not updated the handbook nor included related Department of Defense (DoD) employment initiatives in their interagency agreements. Furthermore, sections of the handbook provide insufficient guidance or are subject to misunderstanding. Adding to interagency cooperation issues, DoD does not have an interagency agreement to coordinate with Labor and VA efforts in DoD's expanding employment assistance.

Gaps in the research

Labor is not required to report program outcomes in relation to performance goals. Labor sets annual performance goals for its veterans' programs, but it is not reporting the results relative to those goals. In addition, in the study conducted on the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program, researchers lacked access to participant-level data and consequently could not determine whether certain veterans' characteristics were associated with positive or negative employment outcomes for the program as a whole.

The evaluators recommended that Labor consider conducting a comprehensive study of participant characteristics and outcomes, using a combination of data maintained on participants and a direct survey of Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program current and past participants.

Conclusion

Continued collaboration among the federal agencies that work with veterans will help improve employment outcomes and benefit those veterans most in need of assistance. Furthermore, defining the criteria for what veterans demand highest priority across all programs and state agencies, especially from DVOP staff, will help make the current resources more efficient and effective.