


GAO
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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-04-996T](#), a report to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

In fiscal year 2003, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) estimated that about 157,000 veterans were legally blind, and about 44,000 of these veterans were enrolled in VA health care. The Chairman of the Subcommittee on Health, House Veterans' Affairs Committee, and the Ranking Minority Member, Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee expressed concerns about VA's rehabilitation services for blind veterans. GAO reviewed (1) the availability of VA outpatient blind rehabilitation services, (2) whether legally blind veterans benefit from VA and non-VA outpatient services, and (3) what factors affect VA's ability to increase veterans' access to blind rehabilitation outpatient services. GAO reviewed VA's blind rehabilitation policies; interviewed officials from VA, the Blinded Veterans Association, state and private nonprofit agencies, and visited five Blind Rehabilitation Centers (BRC).

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs direct the Under Secretary for Health to issue, as soon as possible in fiscal year 2005, a uniform standard of care policy that ensures that a broad range of inpatient and outpatient blind rehabilitation services are more widely available to legally blind veterans. In commenting on a draft of this testimony, VA concurred with our recommendation.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-996T.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Cynthia A. Bascetta at (202) 512-7101.

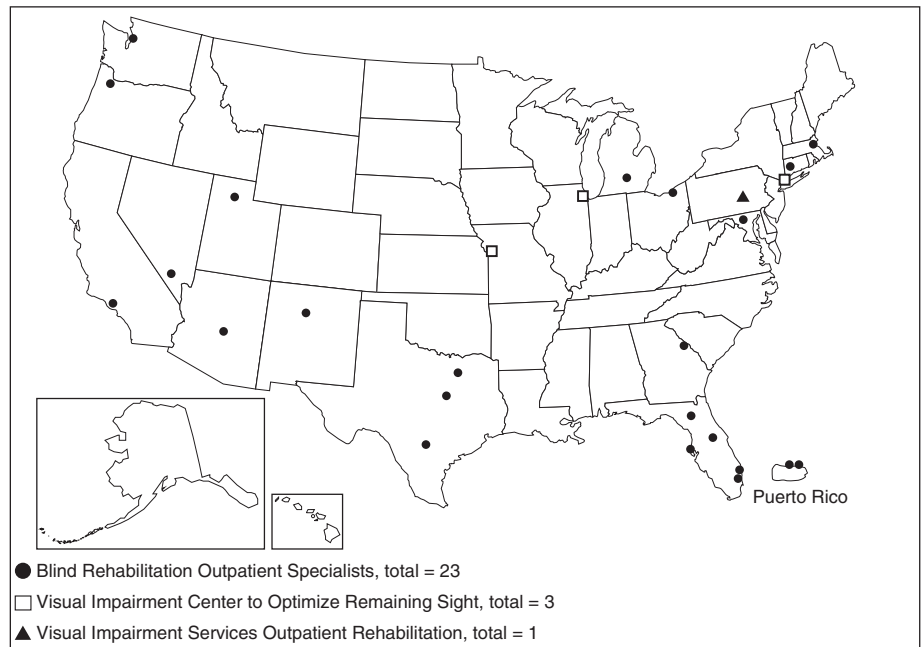
VA HEALTH CARE

More Outpatient Rehabilitation Services for Blind Veterans Could Better Meet Their Needs

What GAO Found

VA provides three types of blind rehabilitation outpatient training services. These services, which are available at a small number of VA locations, range from short-term programs provided in VA facilities to services provided in the veteran's own home. They are Visual Impairment Services Outpatient Rehabilitation, Visual Impairment Center to Optimize Remaining Sight, and Blind Rehabilitation Outpatient Specialists.

Locations of VA Outpatient Blind Rehabilitation Services, May 2004



Source: VA.

VA reported to GAO that some legally blind veterans could benefit from increased access to outpatient blind rehabilitation services. When VA reviewed all of the veterans who, as of March 31, 2004, were on the waiting list for admission to the five BRCs GAO visited, VA officials reported that 315 out of 1,501 of them, or 21 percent, could potentially be better served through access to outpatient blind rehabilitation services, if such services were available.

GAO also identified two factors that may affect the expansion of VA's outpatient blind rehabilitation services. The first involves VA's longstanding position that training for legally blind veterans is best provided in a comprehensive inpatient setting. The second reported factor is VA's method of allocating funds for medical care. VA is currently working to develop an allocation amount that would better reflect the cost of providing blind rehabilitation services on an outpatient basis.