



Highlights of [GAO-04-949](#), a report to congressional requesters.

VA HEALTH CARE

VA Needs to Improve Accuracy of Reported Wait Times for Blind Rehabilitation Services

Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides rehabilitation services to legally blind veterans. These services are intended to help them acquire the skills necessary to become more independent. Almost all of VA's rehabilitation services for legally blind veterans are provided at Blind Rehabilitation Centers (BRC), an inpatient program. VA reported that the average length of time a veteran waited to be admitted to a BRC increased from 168 to 210 days from fiscal years 1999 through 2003. GAO was asked to examine the accuracy of veterans' wait times for admission to BRCs. GAO's objective was to determine whether the average wait times for veterans seeking admission to BRCs reported by VA were accurate. GAO reviewed VA policies and procedures for determining the average length of time veterans wait to be admitted to a BRC. GAO also visited 5 of VA's 10 BRCs to evaluate the reliability of the data used to calculate wait times.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs direct the Under Secretary for Health to instruct (1) the program office to develop more specific instructions for calculating wait times and (2) the BRCs to adhere to these instructions by developing procedures to compile complete and accurate information. VA concurred with GAO's recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-949.

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.

What GAO Found

GAO found that the average length of time VA reported that veterans wait for admission to BRCs was inaccurate. Some data used to calculate wait times were incomplete or incorrect. For example, at one BRC GAO found that one or more of the data elements used to calculate the wait times—the date the BRC received the application, the earliest admission date offered to the veteran, and the date the veteran was admitted to the BRC—were missing from 31 percent of the records and incorrect in 13 percent of the records. GAO also found missing or inaccurate data at two other BRCs. In addition, GAO found that BRCs used different procedures for their calculations, which also contributed to the inaccurate average wait times. For example, two BRCs correctly ended the wait times calculations on the earliest admission date offered to the veteran, while the other three BRCs ended the wait times calculations on the date the veteran was admitted to the BRC. To enable VA to accurately assess wait times, it is essential for VA to develop more comprehensive instructions to calculate average wait times and for BRCs to adhere to them.