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# Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-08-723](#), a report to the Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, Committee on Energy and Commerce, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

Health centers funded through grants under the Health Center Program—managed by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), an agency in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)—provide comprehensive primary care services for the medically underserved. HRSA provides funding for training and technical assistance (TA) cooperative agreement recipients to assist grant applicants. GAO was asked to examine (1) to what extent medically underserved areas (MUA) lacked health center sites in 2006 and 2007 and (2) HRSA's oversight of training and TA cooperative agreement recipients' assistance to grant applicants and its provision of written feedback provided to unsuccessful applicants. To do this, GAO obtained and analyzed HRSA data, grant applications, and the written feedback provided to unsuccessful grant applicants and interviewed HRSA officials.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making recommendations to improve HRSA's oversight of cooperative agreement recipients and the clarity of written feedback provided to unsuccessful grant applicants. HHS concurred and plans to implement these recommendations. However, HHS raised concerns with the report scope and another recommendation to collect site-specific data. GAO believes that the report scope is appropriate and that additional data would benefit HRSA decision making.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-723](#). For more information, contact Cynthia A. Bascetta at (202) 512-7114 or [bascettac@gao.gov](mailto:bascettac@gao.gov).

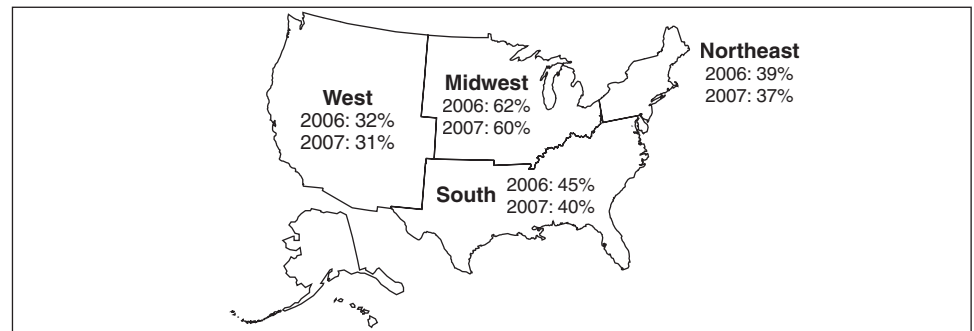
# HEALTH RESOURCES AND SERVICES ADMINISTRATION

## 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 center sites.

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



Source: Copyright © Corel Corp. All rights reserved (map); GAO analysis of HRSA and U.S. Census Bureau data.

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 recipients using a number of methods, including regular communications, review of cooperative agreement applications, and comprehensive on-site reviews. However, the agency's oversight is limited because it lacks standardized performance measures to assess the performance of the cooperative agreement recipients and it is unlikely to meet its policy goal of conducting 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. In addition, without timely comprehensive on-site reviews, HRSA does not have up-to-date comprehensive information on the performance of these recipients in supporting the Health Center Program. HRSA officials stated that they are in the process of developing standardized performance 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.