



Highlights of [GAO-05-210](#), a report to congressional requesters

### Why GAO Did This Study

Diabetes, which afflicts millions of Americans, is a manageable disease whose effects can be mitigated with proper care, regularly received. Experts recommend certain services and supplies for managing diabetes. Because these can be costly, concerns exist about whether individuals with diabetes have access to and receive what they need. Little is known, however, about health plan coverage of diabetes services and supplies.

GAO reviewed the extent to which (1) states require insurance policies to cover diabetes services and supplies, (2) health coverage not subject to state requirements includes diabetes services and supplies, and (3) individuals with diabetes ages 18 and older receive services and supplies. GAO analyzed all 50 states' and the District of Columbia's laws and regulations pertaining to diabetes coverage. GAO also obtained from selected health plans providing coverage not subject to state requirements—13 large-employer plans and 3 plans in the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHBP)—information on coverage of 10 services and nine supplies identified as important for individuals with diabetes. In addition, GAO obtained national data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on individuals' receipt of diabetes services and supplies. GAO received technical comments from CDC and incorporated them in the report as appropriate.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-210](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-210).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Kathryn G. Allen at (202) 512-7118.

## MANAGING DIABETES

### Health Plan Coverage of Services and Supplies

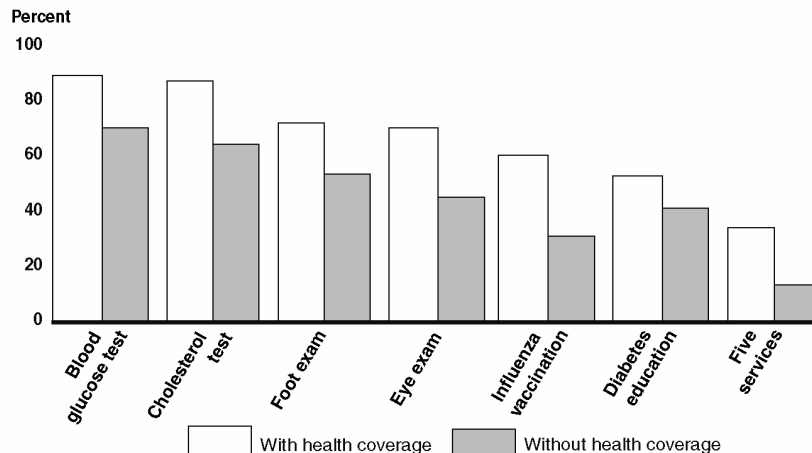
#### What GAO Found

In 2004, 47 states, including the District of Columbia, had laws or regulations related to coverage of diabetes services or supplies, although specific requirements varied by state. Services for which states most often required coverage were diabetes education (45 states) and medical nutrition therapy (27 states). All 47 required coverage of diabetes supplies, although some states were more specific than others about which supplies must be covered.

Health plans GAO contacted that provide coverage not subject to state insurance requirements—those offered by 13 large Fortune 500 companies and the 3 largest health plans in FEHBP—covered most of the services and supplies recommended for individuals with diabetes, generally without limits on the coverage. Each plan covered at least 7 of 10 diabetes services, such as an annual blood glucose test, cholesterol and blood pressure monitoring, and influenza vaccinations, as well as at least five of nine diabetes supplies, such as insulin and insulin-administering supplies.

According to a 2003 CDC nationwide survey, the majority of individuals with diabetes reported receiving at least one diabetes service within the past 12 months. Significantly fewer individuals, however, reported receiving five services that individuals with diabetes are recommended to receive at least once a year. For example, an estimated 88 percent reported receiving a test for blood glucose, whereas an estimated 33 percent had received the five recommended services: blood glucose and cholesterol tests, eye and foot exams, and an influenza vaccination. Receipt of diabetes services and supplies varied by service, state, and whether an individual had health coverage. For example, 71 percent of individuals with diabetes who had health coverage at the time of the survey received eye exams, compared with 46 percent of individuals with diabetes who lacked coverage (see figure).

**Estimated Percentage of Individuals Ages 18 and Older with Diabetes, With and Without Health Coverage, Who Reported Receiving Diabetes Services, 2003**



Source: CDC's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System.