



Highlights of [GAO-05-1052T](#), a testimony before the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) servicemembers and those who are discharged from military service may receive health care from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Since the onset of OIF and OEF, the Department of Defense (DOD) has reported that more than 15,000 servicemembers have been wounded in combat. Those who are seriously injured require comprehensive health care services and may be treated at either DOD or VA medical facilities. Because VA is expected to provide health care to many of the injured OIF and OEF servicemembers, concerns have been raised about the ease with which these individuals and their health care information transition from DOD's to VA's health care system.

This statement is based on GAO's preliminary work on "seamless transition" and focuses on (1) the policies and outreach efforts that VA has instituted to provide timely access to health care to OIF and OEF servicemembers and (2) the extent to which individually identifiable health information is shared systematically between DOD and VA. Since GAO's work is still in the early stages of review, the statement is limited to information gathered to date.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-1052T](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-1052T).

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 or [bascettac@gao.gov](mailto:bascettac@gao.gov).

## VA AND DOD HEALTH CARE

# VA Has Policies and Outreach Efforts to Smooth Transition from DOD Health Care, but Sharing of Health Information Remains Limited

## What GAO Found

Since 2002, VA has developed policies and procedures that direct its medical facilities to provide OIF and OEF servicemembers timely access to care.

Most notably, VA

- assigned VA social workers to selected military treatment facilities in August 2003,
- directed VA facilities to designate combat case managers in October 2003, and
- directed the establishment of four VA polytrauma centers for OIF and OEF servicemembers in June 2005.

In January 2005, VA established the Seamless Transition Office to further improve coordination within the Veterans Benefits Administration and the Veterans Health Administration as well as between DOD and VA. In addition, VA has increased outreach efforts by providing OIF and OEF servicemembers who have been discharged with personal letters and newsletters, a Web site for health information tailored to OIF and OEF servicemembers, counseling services, and briefings on available VA health care services. GAO is in the beginning stages of reviewing VA's efforts to provide a smooth transition from DOD health care and has not yet evaluated the effectiveness of VA's related policies, procedures, and outreach initiatives.

An important issue associated with transitioning servicemembers to VA health care is the sharing of health care information between DOD and VA. The two departments have signed a memorandum of understanding for sharing individually identifiable health information, but the memorandum does not specify the particular types of individually identifiable health information that will be exchanged and when the information will be shared. The absence of specific procedures continues to hinder VA's efforts to obtain needed health information from DOD. Recently, DOD has begun to share certain health assessment information with VA on individuals who have been discharged from the military, and the transmitting of this information to VA on a routine basis is expected to occur in October 2005. However, according to VA officials, DOD is not providing health assessment information to VA for Reserve and National Guard members, who comprise 35 percent of the OIF and OEF forces.