

Highlights of [GAO-05-444T](#), a testimony before the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

More than 10,000 U.S. military servicemembers, including members of the National Guard and Reserve, have been injured in the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. Those with serious physical and psychological injuries are initially treated at the Department of Defense's (DOD) major military treatment facilities (MTF). The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has made provision of services to these servicemembers a high priority. This testimony focuses on the steps VA has taken and the challenges it faces in providing services to the seriously injured and highlights findings from three recent GAO reports that addressed VA's efforts to provide services to the seriously injured. These services include vocational rehabilitation and employment (VR&E) and health care for those with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

What GAO Recommends

In the three previous reports, GAO made recommendations including that VA

- reach an agreement with DOD on access to data;
- develop policy and procedures to keep contact with seriously injured servicemembers; and
- determine the total number of veterans receiving PTSD services.

VA and DOD generally concurred with our recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-444T.

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 DISABILITY BENEFITS AND HEALTH CARE

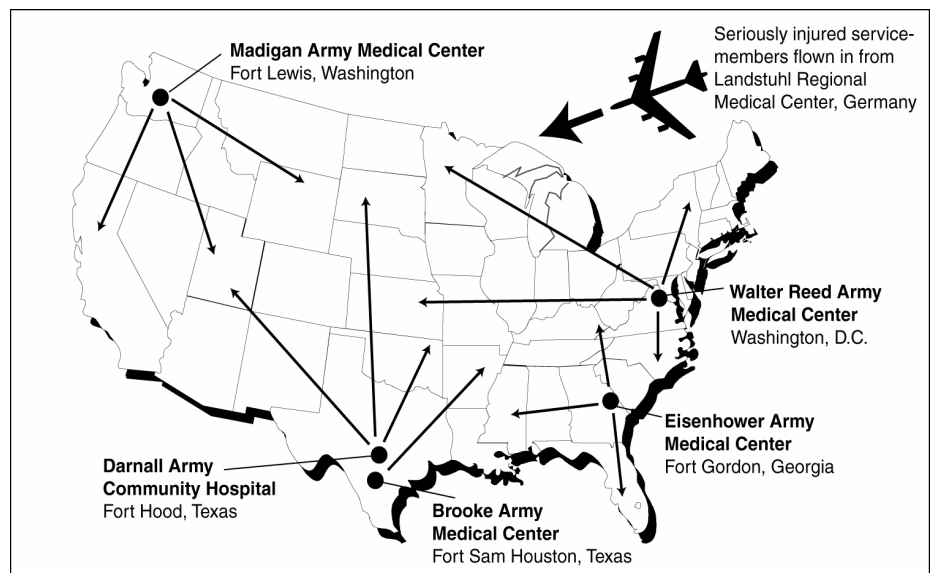
Providing Certain Services to the Seriously Injured Poses Challenges

What GAO Found

VA has taken steps to provide services as a high priority to seriously injured servicemembers returning from Afghanistan and Iraq. To identify and monitor those who may require VA's services, VA and DOD are working on a formal agreement to share data about servicemembers with serious injuries. Meanwhile, VA has relied on its regional offices to coordinate with staff at MTFs and VA medical centers to learn the identities, medical conditions, and military status of seriously injured servicemembers. For servicemembers with PTSD, VA has taken steps to improve care including developing with DOD a clinical practice guideline for identifying and treating individuals with PTSD. The guideline contains a four-question screening tool, which both VA and DOD use to identify those who may be at risk for PTSD.

VA faces significant challenges in providing services to seriously injured servicemembers. For example, the individualized nature of recovery makes it difficult to determine when a seriously injured servicemember will be ready for vocational rehabilitation, and DOD has expressed concern that VA's outreach to servicemembers could affect retention for those whose discharge from military service is uncertain. VA is also challenged by the lack of access to DOD data; although VA staff have developed ad hoc arrangements, such informal agreements can break down. Regarding PTSD, inaccurate data limit VA's ability to estimate its capacity for treating additional veterans and to plan for an increased demand for these services.

Seriously Injured Army Servicemembers Receive Treatment at Five Major Military Treatment Facilities and Relocate to 1 of 57 VA Regions After Medical Stabilization



Source: GAO analysis of DOD and VA data and Art Explosion.