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# Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-09-667T](#), a testimony before the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, U.S. Senate

## Why GAO Did This Study

Health centers funded through grants under the Health Center Program—managed by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)—provide comprehensive primary care services for the medically underserved. The statement GAO is issuing today summarizes an August 2008 report, *Health Resources and Services Administration: Many Underserved Areas Lack a Health Center Site, and the Health Center Program Needs More Oversight* ([GAO-08-723](#)). In that report, GAO examined to what extent medically underserved areas (MUA) lacked health center sites in 2006 and 2007. To do this, GAO obtained and analyzed HRSA data and grant applications and interviewed HRSA officials.

## What GAO Recommends

In its report, GAO recommended, among other things, that HRSA collect site-specific data on services provided at each health center site. HHS commented that collecting these data would be helpful for many purposes, but would create a burden on grantees and add expense to the program. While GAO acknowledges that effort and cost are involved in program management activities, this information is essential for effective HRSA decision making on placement of new health center sites and for evaluating potential service area overlap in MUAs.

View [GAO-09-667T](#) or key components. For more information, contact Cynthia A. Bascetta at (202) 512-7114 or [bascettac@gao.gov](mailto:bascettac@gao.gov).

# HEALTH RESOURCES AND SERVICES ADMINISTRATION

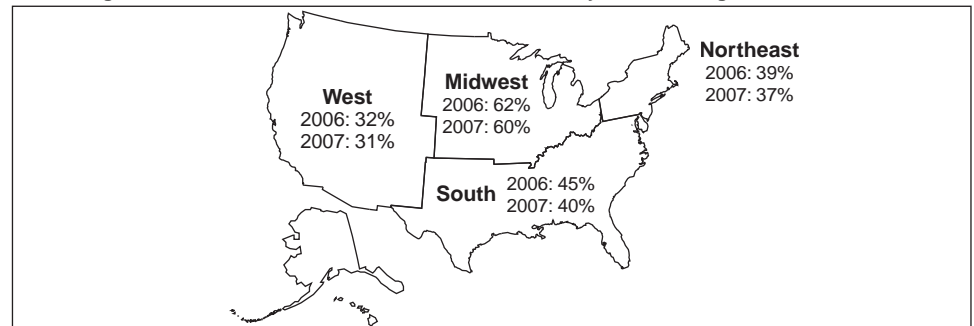
## Many Underserved Areas Lack a Health Center Site, and Data Are Needed on Service Provision at Sites

### What GAO Found

In its August 2008 report, which is summarized in this statement, GAO found the following:

- 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.
- There was wide geographic variation in the percentage of MUAs that lacked a health center site in both years. (See figure.)
- Most of the 2007 nationwide decline in the number of MUAs that lacked a health center 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.
- HRSA lacked 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.

GAO concluded that from 2006 to 2007, HRSA's grant awards to open new health center sites reduced the number of MUAs that lacked a site by about 7 percent. However, in 2007, 43 percent of MUAs continued to lack a health center site, and the grants for new sites awarded that year had little impact on the wide variation among census regions and states in the percentage of MUAs lacking a health center site. GAO reported that HRSA's grants to open new health center sites increased access to primary health care services for underserved populations in needy areas, including MUAs. However, HRSA's ability to place new health center sites in locations where they are most needed was limited because HRSA does not collect and maintain readily available information on the services provided at individual health center sites. Because each health center site may not provide the full range of comprehensive primary care services, having readily available information on the services provided at each site is important for HRSA's effective consideration of need when distributing federal resources for new health center sites.