
May 1996

Health
Education
Employment
Social Security
Welfare
Veterans

Preface

This monthly bibliography lists the U.S. General Accounting Office's (GAO) recently released products on health, education, employment, social security, disability, welfare, and veterans issues.

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New Releases

Health

Medicare: Federal Efforts to Enhance Patient Quality of Care (Report, GAO/HEHS-96-20, Apr. 10, 1996). Contact: Sandra K. Isaacson, (202) 512-7174

The Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA) is modifying its Medicare quality assurance programs to incorporate the latest research on outcome indicators and current concepts of continuous quality improvement. However, HCFA's efforts in distributing comparative performance data lag behind those of state agencies and many employers in the private sector. Furthermore, GAO's analysis of HCFA's previous implementation efforts raises concerns about how well HCFA will implement comprehensive programs to deal effectively with poorly performing providers and improve all providers' performance.

European Union Drug Approval: Overview of New European Medicines Evaluation Agency and Approval Process (Report, GAO/HEHS-96-71, Apr. 5, 1996). Contact: John C. Hansen, (202) 512-7105

As an important step in establishing a single European marketplace for prescription drugs, the European Union recently modified its drug approval procedures and created a new agency—the European Medicines Evaluation Agency—to provide a faster and more efficient drug approval process that would benefit consumers and industry. Advocates of reforming the U.S. Food and Drug Administration have suggested the European model may provide some alternative approaches worth adopting. However, because the new system has been operational for only a year, it is too soon to determine whether it will enable pharmaceutical companies to more quickly market their products throughout Europe.

Education

Private Management of Public Schools: Experiences in Four School Districts (Report, GAO/HEHS-96-3, Apr. 19, 1996). Contact: Fred E. Yohey, (202) 512-7218

The early experiences of four school districts that contracted with private, for-profit companies for school management have yielded mixed results. Although scores on standardized achievement tests did not substantially improve in the three districts where test scores were available for analysis, in all four districts the private management companies made changes that benefited students. For example, student attendance improved in Dade County, Florida, and Minneapolis, Minnesota, and the instructional approach implemented in Baltimore, Maryland, and Dade County placed

teaching assistants—most with college degrees—in every classroom. In Baltimore and Hartford, Connecticut, school building repair and maintenance were enhanced and the number of computers available to students was increased.

Employment

Job Training: Small Business Participation in Selected Training Programs (Report, GAO/HEHS-96-106, Apr. 29, 1996). Contact: Charles Jeszeck, (202) 512-7036

Large employers are about twice as likely to take advantage of several types of training programs as are employers with fewer than 100 workers. Small employers may perceive barriers, such as detailed administrative or other paperwork requirements, that make their participation in training programs more difficult. Also, small employers may not find programs useful if they focus on workers' general needs rather than on employers' specific skill needs, and small employers often know less about available training programs than large employers. To reduce barriers for small employers, some training programs GAO reviewed encourage consortia that provide information, technical assistance, and other types of help.

Social Security, Disability, and Welfare

Supplemental Security Income: Some Recipients Transfer Valuable Resources to Qualify for Benefits (Report, GAO/HEHS-96-79, Apr. 30, 1996). Contact: Christopher Crissman, (202) 512-7051

The Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program is the country's largest cash assistance program for the poor and one of the fastest-growing entitlement programs. Currently, the law does not prohibit people from transferring resources to qualify for SSI benefits, which are intended for people who are aged, blind, or disabled. Between 1990 and 1994, 3,505 individuals transferred cash, houses, land, and other items valued at an estimated \$74 million to make themselves eligible for SSI benefits. Although implementing a transfer-of-resource restriction would increase the Social Security Administration's (SSA) administrative costs, GAO estimated that from 1990 through December 1995, \$14.6 million of SSI program expenditures could have been saved if a restriction similar to one used in Medicaid's long-term care program had been in place. Such a restriction could also assure the public that only those who need SSI will receive it.

Social Security: Issues Involving Benefit Equity for Working Women (Report, GAO/HEHS-96-55, Apr. 10, 1996). Contact: Michael D. Packard, (202) 512-7250

Several issues have been raised about the fairness of women's Social Security benefits. These issues arise because women, more than men, are eligible for dependent's benefits, as spouses or survivors, based on their current or former spouse's earnings. Thus, they are more often subject to the dual entitlement limitation, which reduces the dependent's benefits by \$1 for every \$1 of Social Security retirement benefits the dependent receives. Increases in married women's labor force participation (from 15 percent in 1940 to 60 percent today) may intensify concerns about the fairness of the benefits they receive. Most proposals addressing these concerns have not been adopted. They would either increase benefit and/or administrative costs or reduce benefits for some beneficiaries.

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