



Highlights of [GAO-10-570](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides, or pays for, a range of mental health services for veterans. To effectively manage resources and ensure access to eligible veterans, VA needs complete spending and workload information for mental health services. This information is also important for congressional oversight

GAO was asked to examine VA's mental health spending and workload. In this report, GAO examined for fiscal year 2009 (1) VA's spending for mental health services and (2) VA's workload for mental health services. GAO examined VA's reporting of mental health spending and workload data for fiscal year 2009 in its fiscal year 2011 congressional budget justification and whether VA reported these data in any other publicly available report. GAO analyzed additional mental health spending and workload data and interviewed VA officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that VA report in its annual congressional budget justification or in a separate annual report that is publicly available additional workload and spending information for its mental health services. VA concurred with three recommendations, but did not concur with the recommendations regarding Vet Centers. GAO believes the Vet Center recommendations could be implemented while addressing VA's concerns.

[View GAO-10-570 or key components.](#)
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VA HEALTH CARE

Reporting of Spending and Workload for Mental Health Services Could Be Improved

What GAO Found

VA reported in its fiscal year 2011 congressional budget justification spending about \$4.4 billion on mental health services in fiscal year 2009 in VA settings primarily used for providing mental health services. However, VA had additional spending in fiscal year 2009 for mental health services that VA did not report as mental health spending in its budget justification or in any other publicly available report. Specifically, VA did not report as mental health spending the amounts it spent for those mental health services that it (1) paid non-VA providers to provide in community settings and (2) provided in VA settings not primarily used for providing mental health services, such as nursing homes. VA also did not report as mental health spending the amount it spent for counseling services to address mental health issues provided by VA Vet Centers. Although VA did not report this spending information, VA does determine its spending for mental health services provided by non-VA providers and for outpatient mental health services provided in VA settings not primarily used for providing mental health services. According to VA officials, VA spent an additional \$269 million for these services in fiscal year 2009. VA does not have complete spending information for inpatient hospital mental health services provided by mental health providers in VA settings not primarily used to provide mental health services nor does it have spending information for counseling services to address mental health issues provided by Vet Centers.

In fiscal year 2009, VA provided mental health services to about 1.22 million unique patients in VA settings primarily used for providing mental health services. However, VA did not report this information in its fiscal year 2011 congressional budget justification or in any other publicly available report. VA officials said that the number of unique patients is not available until after VA's budget justification is published. Additionally, VA did not report other workload information that it has on (1) the number of encounters for outpatient services and the average daily census for each of its inpatient hospital, residential, and domiciliary services provided in VA settings primarily used for providing mental health services and (2) the workload for mental health services provided in other settings—community settings for which VA paid non-VA providers to provide mental health services and VA settings not primarily used for providing mental health services. VA also did not report the workload for counseling services to address mental health issues provided by Vet Centers, but VA is able to estimate its workload for these services.

VA's reporting of mental health spending and workload does not give Congress a complete overview of VA's mental health services and limits information available for congressional oversight of VA's mental health services. Reporting additional mental health spending and workload information could enhance information available for congressional oversight.