



Highlights of [GAO-10-786](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Adaptive housing assistance grants help eligible service members or veterans adapt or modify a residence to accommodate disabilities sustained through military service. The Veterans' Housing Opportunity and Benefits Improvement Act of 2006 authorized the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to expand its existing adaptive housing assistance grants to include eligible individuals temporarily living in a home owned by a family member, known as Temporary Residence Adaptation (TRA) grants. The act also mandated GAO to issue interim and final reports on VA's implementation of TRA. This final report examines (1) the characteristics of TRA grants and grantees and (2) what accounts for low utilization of the program and how to ensure that the program serves its intended recipients. To address these objectives, GAO analyzed VA data and documents and interviewed service members and veterans who both had and had not used the TRA grant.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that VA evaluate current methods of communicating information about TRA grants to eligible individuals and take appropriate measures to improve awareness of the program among such individuals. VA agreed with GAO's recommendations and described actions to address them.

View [GAO-10-786](#) or [key components](#).
For more information, contact Mathew J. Scire` at (202) 512-8678 or sciremj@gao.gov.

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Opportunities Exist to Improve Potential Recipients' Awareness of the Temporary Residence Adaptation Grant

What GAO Found

Use of the TRA grant program has been low—from the program's inception on June 15, 2006, through April 4, 2010, VA processed only 18 TRA grants. Therefore, only a very small proportion of the thousands of individuals potentially eligible for adaptive housing assistance have used TRA. Half of these grantees were under the age of 40 and half were over the age of 40. The average age of those under 40 was 26 years. Among those over 40, seven were over the age of 60. Of the 11 TRA grantees we interviewed, all had lost the use of both legs, and most also had other disabilities, such as brain trauma. Three of the grantees we interviewed were injured abroad while serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom, four grantees were injured domestically in a vehicle or sporting accident, and four grantees suffered an illness, such as multiple sclerosis. Of the 18 TRA grants that had been awarded, 11 were for the maximum allowable amount of \$14,000, and 3 others were near that maximum. In some cases, the cost of adaptations exceeded the amount of the TRA grant and was supplemented by donations, other grants, or the grantee's own funds.

Interviews we conducted with 50 service members and veterans eligible for adaptive housing benefits suggest that awareness of TRA may be low and that the program may not be reaching all of the individuals who could benefit from it. While most of the 50 interviewees were familiar with adaptive housing benefits in general, 38 were not familiar with the TRA program in particular and did not know that adaptive housing grants can be used to modify a home owned by a family member. In addition, while TRA was not applicable for the personal circumstances of many of the interviewees, in seven cases individuals described personal circumstances well suited for use of TRA and said they likely would have used the TRA program had they previously been aware of it. An additional seven said they would have at least considered using the program had they been aware of it. The extent to which TRA is addressed in VA's information sources about adaptive housing benefits is limited—for example, VA does not have a separate fact sheet for TRA, and it is unclear how consistently VA representatives publicize the opportunity to use TRA when conducting outreach to and interviews with service members and veterans. One of the stated core values of the VA office that administers TRA is to communicate to veterans in a timely, thorough, and accurate manner. A better understanding is needed of potential information gaps that may be occurring when severely disabled service members transition to civilian life and when veterans are informed about adaptive housing benefits. Additional efforts to make eligible individuals better aware of the TRA grant program could help ensure that the program more fully serves its intended beneficiaries.