



US DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS **OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL**

Office of Audits and Evaluations

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

Action Needed to Ensure VA Meets Staffing and Vacancy Reporting Requirements under the MISSION Act of 2018

Review

24-01170-232

September 17, 2024

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Executive Summary

The VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) conducted this review to assess VA's compliance with mandated reporting of staffing and vacancy data on its public website and its clarity in related explanations.¹ VA is required to publicly release this information each quarter by the MISSION Act of 2018 to promote transparency in personnel management.² The MISSION Act also requires the OIG to review VA's data-reporting website and make recommendations for improvement. Congress expanded the staffing and vacancy reporting requirements when the Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020 was passed, requiring additional time-to-hire information.³

The OIG published four reports pursuant to the MISSION Act in June 2019, 2020, and 2021, as well as in October 2022.⁴ The most recent review found that VA did not fully comply with the expanded time-to-hire reporting requirements included in the Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act by omitting potential hires from its breakdown of time spent in each hiring step of the time-to-hire model. The review also found that VA did not account for every required step of the hiring process. During that review, VA took action to correct these omitted hiring steps. As of December 2023, both recommendations for this report were closed as implemented.

What the Review Found

VA complied with staffing and vacancy reporting requirements established by the MISSION Act by publishing data on onboard personnel, gains and losses, vacancies, and time-to-hire.

However, VA did not mention steps taken to improve the onboarding process at medical facilities that exceeded time-to-hire metrics in its 2023 annual report, as required by the Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act. VA agreed to ensure that portion of the legislation is addressed in future reports.

As required by the MISSION Act and as revised in the Continuing Appropriations Act, 2021 and Other Extensions Act, the OIG identified opportunities for VA to improve the staffing and

¹ For information on the OIG's scope and methodology, see appendix A.

² John S. McCain III, Daniel K. Akaka, and Samuel R. Johnson VA Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks (MISSION) Act of 2018, Pub. L. No. 115-182, § 505, 132 Stat. 1393, 1477. The full text of the relevant section of this act appears in appendix B.

³ Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020, Pub. L. No. 116-315, § 3008, 134 Stat. 4932, 4996–97 (2021). The full text of the relevant section of this act appears in appendix C.

⁴ VA OIG, [Staffing and Vacancy Reporting under the MISSION Act of 2018](#), Report No. 19-00266-141, June 25, 2019; VA OIG, [VA Improved the Transparency of Mandatory Staffing and Vacancy Data](#), Report No. 20-00541-149, June 3, 2020; VA OIG, [Inconsistent Human Resources Practices Inhibit Staffing and Vacancy Transparency](#), Report No. 20-00541-133, June 10, 2021; VA OIG, [Review of VA's Staffing and Vacancy Reporting under the MISSION Act of 2018](#), Report No. 22-01440-254, October 31, 2022.

vacancy information reported on the public website.⁵ The review team found that VA could clarify the reason for reporting vacancies as funded and unfunded, define the scope for the annual reports, and ensure consistency of data sources described in written procedures versus published reports.

What the OIG Recommended

The OIG made one recommendation to the assistant secretary for human resources and administration/operations, security, and preparedness (HRA/OSP) to ensure the annual reports to Congress include the steps VA is taking to improve the onboard timeline for facilities for which the duration of the onboarding process exceeds the metrics laid out in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) time-to-hire model, or successor model, in accordance with the Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020.

VA Management Comments and OIG Response

The assistant secretary for HRA/OSP concurred with the recommendation and provided a corrective action plan. Although not required, VHA and the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) also provided concurrence with the draft report. Appendixes E, F, and G provide the full text of comments from the assistant secretary for HRA/OSP, the under secretary for health, and the under secretary for benefits. The OIG will monitor implementation of the planned action and will close the recommendation when VA provides sufficient evidence of adequate progress in addressing the identified issue.



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⁵ Continuing Appropriations Act, 2021 and Other Extensions Act, Pub. L. No. 116-159, § 5108, 134 Stat. 709, 749 (2020). Appendix D provides the full text of the relevant section of this act.

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Abbreviations

FTE	full-time equivalent
FY	fiscal year
HRA/OSP	Human Resources and Administration/Operations, Security, and Preparedness
OIG	Office of Inspector General
OPM	Office of Personnel Management
VBA	Veterans Benefits Administration
VHA	Veterans Health Administration



Introduction

Congress's concerns about VA's occupational shortages are reflected in the passage of at least five laws since 2014 that require a periodic accounting of vacancies within the Veterans Health Administration (VHA).⁶ Beginning in 2015, the VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) Office of Healthcare Inspections issued annual reports that identified occupations in VHA with severe staffing shortages. In the fiscal year (FY) 2023 report, the most commonly identified severe occupational shortages were for psychologists, medical support assistants, practical nurses, social workers, and custodial workers.⁷

The VA MISSION Act of 2018 became public law on June 6, 2018. It established a permanent community care program, a capital asset review process, and several initiatives to improve recruitment and retention and minimize healthcare provider shortages.⁸ To monitor whether VA is effectively addressing staffing shortages, the MISSION Act requires the VA Secretary to report annually on steps taken to achieve full staffing capacity and the additional funds needed to achieve this staffing level. The act also requires that VA make publicly available on an internet website certain data aimed at personnel transparency.⁹ Specifically, VA is required to publish by departmental component or by medical facility for VHA

- the number of current personnel,
- the number of employment gains and losses processed during the previous quarter,
- the number of staff vacancies by occupation, and
- the percentage of new hires who were hired within the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) time-to-hire target of 80 days.¹⁰

⁶ Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014, Pub. L. No. 113-146, § 301, 128 Stat. 1754, 1784–88; VA Choice and Quality Employment Act of 2017, Pub. L. No. 115-46, § 201, 131 Stat. 958, 959; John S. McCain III, Daniel K. Akaka, and Samuel R. Johnson VA Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks (MISSION) Act of 2018, Pub. L. No. 115-182, § 505, 132 Stat. 1393, 1477; Continuing Appropriations Act, 2021 and Other Extensions Act, Pub. L. No. 116-159, § 5108, 134 Stat. 709, 749 (2020); Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020, Pub. L. No. 116-315, § 3008, 134 Stat. 4932, 4996–97 (2021).

⁷ VA OIG, [*OIG Determination of Veterans Health Administration's Severe Occupational Staffing Shortages Fiscal Year 2023*](#), Report No. 23-00659-186, August 22, 2023. For more information about the scope and methodology of the current review, see appendix A.

⁸ MISSION Act of 2018, §§ 101, 202, 203, and 301–306.

⁹ MISSION Act of 2018, § 505. The full text of this section can be found in appendix B.

¹⁰ “End to End Hiring Initiative,” OPM, March 2017. This guidance document defines “time-to-hire” as the number of elapsed calendar days between the establishment of the hiring need and the new employee's first day of work. This initiative also set the time-to-hire target at 80 days.

The MISSION Act required VA to first publish the data 90 days after enactment of the law and provide updates each following quarter.¹¹ VA published the initial personnel information on August 31, 2018, and each subsequent quarter to date, totaling 24 postings.

VA's Office of Human Resources and Administration/Operations, Security, and Preparedness (HRA/OSP) retrieves and aggregates the data required under the MISSION Act. HRA/OSP's manpower management service and Center for Enterprise Human Resources Information Services collect data for the staffing and vacancy reports. Representatives from VA components have the opportunity to review and verify the data.¹² HRA/OSP publishes these data quarterly on a public website.

The data are drawn from two systems: HR Smart and USA Staffing. HR Smart is VA's human resources information system that supports payroll and position management. HR Smart organizes data by position, rather than by employee, and allows for real-time human resources transaction processing for all of VA. Data pertaining to current staff, gains and losses, and vacancies are obtained from HR Smart. USA Staffing is an OPM-administered system that federal agencies use to recruit, assess, certify, select, and bring employees into their organizations. The system provides related tools, including data analytics, which allow VA to calculate time-to-hire percentages for new employees.

Supplemental Requirement for VA to Report VHA Time-to-Hire Data

In addition to the MISSION Act, Congress included relevant staffing and vacancy reporting requirements when it passed the Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020 in January 2021.¹³ In particular, this law amended section 505 of the MISSION Act by requiring VA to publish additional time-to-hire information for title 38 and hybrid title 38 employees.¹⁴ This law mandates tracking

- the number of new hires who exceeded the metrics in VHA's time-to-hire model;
- the percentage of new hires who exceeded these metrics, when compared to all employees hired; and

¹¹ MISSION Act of 2018, § 505.

¹² Department components include VHA, the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), the National Cemetery Administration, and the Office of General Counsel.

¹³ Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act § 3008. The full text of this section can be found in appendix C.

¹⁴ Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act § 3008. The reporting requirements of this act refer to the employees hired under 38 U.S.C. § 7401(1) (referred to as title 38) and 38 U.S.C. § 7401(3) (referred to as hybrid title 38). Title 38 positions can include physicians, nurses, and dentists, and hybrid title 38 positions can include pharmacists, physical therapists, and psychologists.

- the average number of days potential hires or new hires spent in each phase of the VHA time-to-hire target.

The Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act also amended requirements for the annual report, mandating VA include the steps taken to improve the timeline for facilities whose onboarding process exceeds the metrics laid out in the VHA time-to-hire model.

Requirements for the OIG to Review VA's Staffing and Vacancy Data

Section 505 of the MISSION Act mandates the OIG to review the administration of VA's website and make recommendations for improvement. The Continuing Appropriations Act, 2021 and Other Extensions Act reiterated the requirement for the OIG to review VA's staffing and vacancy website and develop recommendations for legislative or administrative action.¹⁵ This law also specifically called for the OIG to publish two reports due no later than October 31, 2022, and October 31, 2024, and as frequently thereafter as the OIG considers appropriate. The OIG conducted this review to assess VA's compliance with mandated staffing and vacancy reporting on its public website and its clarity in related explanations.

Results of Previous OIG Reports Mandated by Section 505 of the MISSION Act

The OIG published four prior reports in accordance with the MISSION Act's requirements. In the first report, issued on June 25, 2019, the OIG determined that VA partially complied with the MISSION Act's requirements by reporting current personnel and time-to-hire data as mandated.¹⁶ However, VA's reporting of staff vacancies and employee gains and losses was not sufficiently transparent to allow tracking because vacancies were reported in broad occupational groupings, and gains and losses were reported in aggregate numbers. The OIG recommended the assistant secretary for human resources and administration take appropriate action to ensure that vacancies and employee gains and losses are reported as required by the MISSION Act.¹⁷ As of June 2020, all recommendations from this report were closed as implemented.

¹⁵ Continuing Appropriations Act, 2021 and Other Extensions Act § 5108. The full text of this section appears in appendix D.

¹⁶ VA OIG, [Staffing and Vacancy Reporting under the MISSION Act of 2018](#), Report No. 19-00266-141, June 25, 2019.

¹⁷ Effective September 12, 2018, the position of assistant secretary for operations, security, and preparedness was eliminated. The Office of Operations, Security, and Preparedness and its associated functions were reassigned to the assistant secretary for human resources and administration.

The OIG issued its second report on June 3, 2020.¹⁸ In this report, the review team found that VA improved the transparency and utility of its staffing and vacancy data by including additional elements in its reporting, such as summary and historical information. However, corrective actions were still needed for VA to comply with the MISSION Act's requirements. The review team found that VA reported time-to-hire data using an alternative 100-day measure instead of OPM's 80-day model as required. The OIG recommended that the assistant secretary for HRA/OSP ensure time-to-hire percentages are reported as required by the MISSION Act and confer with the Office of General Counsel regarding changes to VA's reporting methodology. As of January 2021, all recommendations from this report were also closed as implemented.

In the OIG's third report, issued on June 10, 2021, the OIG found that VA took actions to address long-standing data integrity concerns with HR Smart position data.¹⁹ However, VA continued to experience challenges reconciling the actual number of vacant positions and the corresponding position inventory in HR Smart. The review team identified opportunities to improve the transparency and governance of HR Smart position data and thus improve the quality of reported information. The OIG recommended the acting assistant secretary for HRA/OSP examine and validate HR Smart inventory data; establish standards to ensure positions are consistently approved, created, and maintained; and regularly monitor position management. The OIG also recommended the acting under secretary for health implement policy and procedures for staffing level approvals and publish detailed guidance establishing authoritative position management documents. As of July 2024, four of the five recommendations remained open as unimplemented.

The OIG's fourth and most recent report was issued on October 31, 2022.²⁰ In this report, the review team found that VA did not fully comply with the expanded time-to-hire reporting requirements included in the Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act. VA did not include all applicable process steps when calculating time-to-hire metrics that exceeded timeliness goals for title 38 and hybrid title 38 employees. In June 2022, prior to the report's publication, VA took action to correct this calculation. Separately, VA omitted potential hires from its breakdown of how long it took to complete individual hiring steps. The OIG made two recommendations to the assistant secretary for HRA/OSP, including potentially requesting legislative relief from Congress or otherwise explaining reporting limitations in accordance with the Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act. As of December 2023, both recommendations were closed as implemented.

¹⁸ VA OIG, [*VA Improved the Transparency of Mandatory Staffing and Vacancy Data*](#), Report No. 20-00541-149, June 3, 2020.

¹⁹ VA OIG, [*Inconsistent Human Resources Practices Inhibit Staffing and Vacancy Transparency*](#), Report No. 20-00541-133, June 10, 2021.

²⁰ VA OIG, [*Review of VA's Staffing and Vacancy Reporting under the MISSION Act of 2018*](#), Report No. 22-01440-254, October 31, 2022.

Results and Recommendation

Finding: VA Needs to Comply with All Applicable Requirements and Improve Transparency of Staffing and Vacancy Reports

VA complied with MISSION Act requirements by reporting data on onboard personnel, gains and losses, vacancies, and time-to-hire. However, VA did not fully comply with expanded requirements in the Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act. Although the review team identified facilities that exceeded the onboarding metric, VA did not include in its annual report the steps taken to improve the onboard timeline at these facilities. The review team also identified other opportunities to improve the staffing and vacancy reports published on VA's public website. VA could clarify information related to vacancies, define the scope of data presented in its annual reports, and ensure data sources published are consistent with documented procedures. VA agreed to make improvements based on the review team's observations.

What the OIG Did

The team identified and reviewed applicable laws, as well as guidance from OPM, HRA/OSP, and VHA. The team reviewed publicly released staffing and vacancy information and data definitions and interviewed HRA/OSP personnel to discuss the staffing and vacancy data.²¹

VA's 2023 Annual Report Did Not Identify Steps Taken to Improve Onboard Timelines at Noncompliant Facilities

As noted previously, the MISSION Act requires VA to report annually on the steps taken to achieve full staffing capacity and the additional funds needed to achieve this staffing level.²² The Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act also mandates that each report include the steps VA is taking to improve the onboard timeline for facilities whose process exceeds the metrics laid out in the VHA time-to-hire model.²³ The review team found that VA's 2022 annual report met the requirements of both acts. Additionally, VA's 2023 annual report complied with the MISSION Act by describing the steps taken to achieve full staffing capacity and by stating that VA did not need additional money to achieve this capacity. However, it omitted the steps VA is taking to improve the onboard timeline despite many facilities exceeding VHA's time-to-hire model metrics.

²¹ The review team accepted VA's data and did not perform additional substantive analysis or testing for accuracy.

²² MISSION Act of 2018, § 505(b).

²³ Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act § 3008(b).

VHA's time-to-hire model uses an 80-day target for hybrid title 38 employees and a 100-day target for title 38 employees.²⁴ The review team found VHA facilities exceeded these marks during the 2023 reporting period, as shown in figure 1.

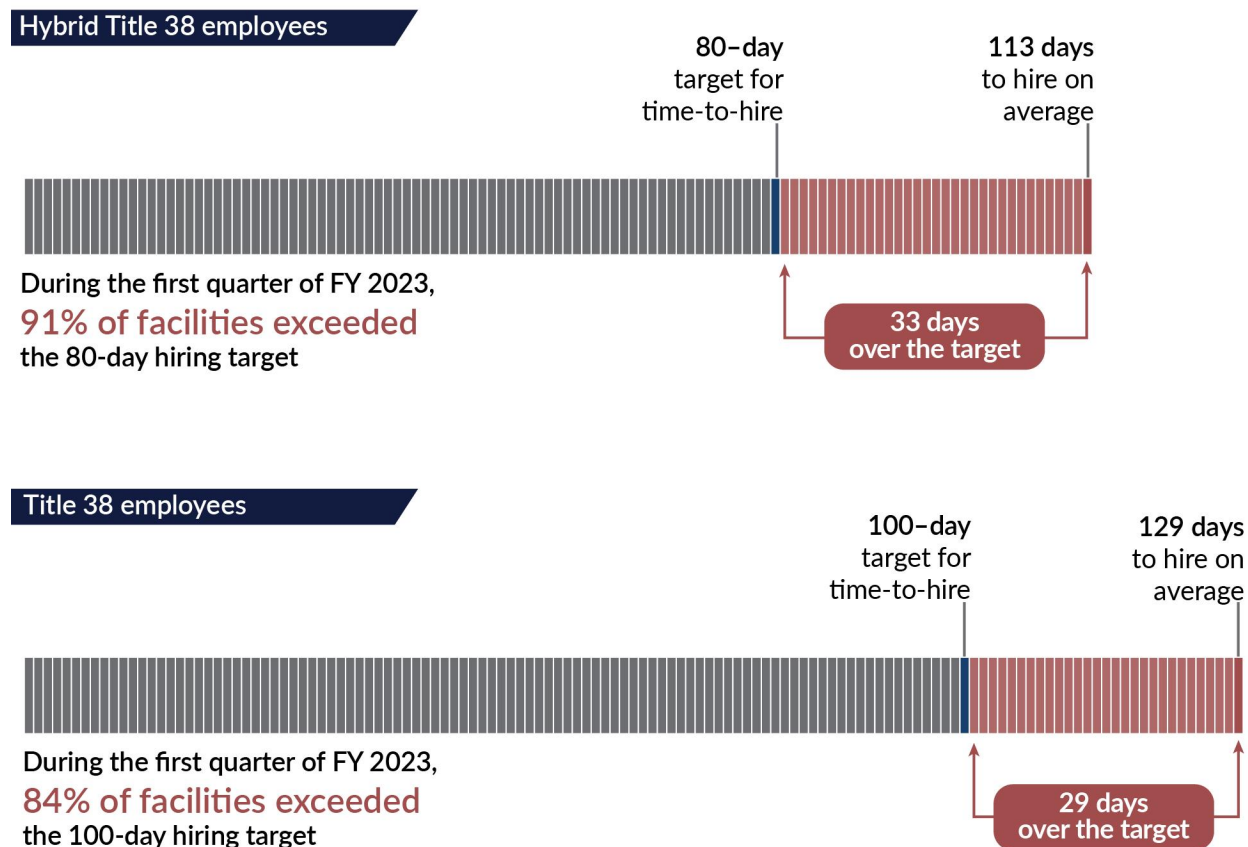


Figure 1. Time-to-hire results for VHA facilities in FY 2023, quarter 1.

Source: OIG analysis of VHA time-to-hire guidance and data presented in the VA MISSION Act Section 505 report for quarter 1 of FY 2023.

During the first quarter of FY 2023, 91 percent of VHA facilities exceeded the 80-day target for hybrid title 38 employees, averaging 113 days, or 33 days beyond the target.²⁵ Similarly, 84 percent of VHA facilities exceeded the 100-day target for title 38 employees, averaging 129 days, or 29 days past the target.

Given the performance at VHA facilities, VA should have reported steps to improve the onboard timeline as required by the Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act. In the absence

²⁴ VHA, VHA Time to Hire (T2H) Implementation Guidebook 2.0, September 2020.

²⁵ VA staffing and vacancy reports displayed time-to-hire data by VHA medical facility, using a count of 139 facilities.

of that information, the OIG concluded that VA did not fully comply with the act and should address that portion of the legislation.

As of May 2024, the chief human capital officer shared that the manpower management service, the HRA/OSP chief of staff, and the chief human capital office will ensure that future reports comply with the legislative requirement.

Opportunities Exist to Improve the Transparency of Published Staffing and Vacancy Reports

In addition to assessing VA's compliance with reporting requirements, the review team identified opportunities to improve the transparency of information VA reports on the public website as required by the MISSION Act.²⁶ VA could clarify its staffing and vacancy data by identifying the reason for reporting vacancies as funded and unfunded and by establishing a date range for the scope of data presented in the annual reports. VA also could better ensure consistency of vacancy data sources between written procedures and published reports.

Reporting of Funded and Unfunded Vacancies Lacked Clear Explanation

The MISSION Act requires VA to report the number of vacancies by occupation. Starting with the FY 2020 quarter 3 report, released on September 8, 2020, VA split its vacancy information into two categories: funded vacancies and unfunded vacancies.²⁷ VA defined funded vacancies as positions not filled by full-time equivalent (FTE) employees that are within the budget operating plan levels. This includes vacant positions that are marked as approved, active, and budgeted. Unfunded vacancies were defined as positions not filled by FTEs that are in excess of the budget operating plan levels. For both funded and unfunded vacancies, VA noted in its published reports that the vacant positions do not “. . . necessarily indicate that there is a staffing gap or lapsed hiring action impacting the VA's mission.”

For the eight quarters published during this review's scope, VA reported VHA vacancies as 100 percent unfunded, and Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) and National Cemetery Administration vacancies as mixed between funded and unfunded. Further, VA reported staff office vacancies as 100 percent funded for six quarters and mixed between funded and unfunded for the remaining two quarters.²⁸ However, the review team could not ascertain from the

²⁶ MISSION Act of 2018, § 505(a)(5).

²⁷ VA's published staffing and vacancy reports noted, “Funded or unfunded FTEs [full-time equivalents] are determined by comparing the onboard FTEs and vacant FTEs to the fiscal budget operating plan. The FTEs up to the budget operating plan targets are considered funded. If there are additional FTEs remaining, they are considered unfunded.”

²⁸ VA staff offices offer enterprise-level support for the execution of veterans' programs by providing auxiliary services, such as human resources management, information technology, and acquisition.

publications alone why VA elected to separate vacancies into the funded and unfunded categories when it was not required by the MISSION Act. VA could enhance the transparency of the reported vacancy information by explaining the rationale behind reporting vacancies as funded and unfunded and how VA is improving the accuracy of vacancy data.

The OIG has previously reported on data quality concerns with VA's position inventory.²⁹ The HRA/OSP manpower management service director told the review team in April 2024 that separating the vacancy data into funded and unfunded categories gives readers more context due to these known data quality issues. As presented, the vacancy data show funded positions that are being actively recruited, as well as vacant positions that are without a recruitment action and not funded.

The director continued to explain that the unfunded vacancies are a focus of VA's position validation efforts. The HRA/OSP manpower management service is developing plans to audit vacancies and position data. This plan includes sending the position-based vacancy data to medical centers for verification or edits, which would allow VA to identify a staffing capacity gap if one exists. The director told the OIG team that once the vacancy data is validated, VA can more accurately report the staffing capacity to meet the needs of the veteran population. The director estimated this effort could take about three years to complete.

Because there is no requirement to differentiate the vacancy data as funded and unfunded and VA is starting to perform audits that will validate vacant positions, the OIG did not make a recommendation related to this issue.

Annual Reports Could Be Improved by Identifying Scope of Data

VA's annual reports to Congress, published in June of 2022 and 2023, contained footnotes indicating that the onboard personnel and turnover data were current as of March 31 of the respective years. However, those reports did not otherwise define the scope or explicitly state a date range covered by the material presented. The review team determined that VA could improve transparency by clearly noting the date range used for the annual reports.

The HRA/OSP manpower management service director explained to the review team that VA mostly uses previous fiscal year data to develop the information presented in the annual reports. However, VA uses the current fiscal year's quarter 2 to describe the onboard personnel data. The director explained that VA aims to publish the annual reports in June and the decision to use the set of data described is to ensure they can meet that required deadline. However, the director

²⁹ VA OIG, *Staffing and Vacancy Reporting under the MISSION Act of 2018*, June 25, 2019. VA OIG, *Inconsistent Human Resources Practices Inhibit Staffing and Vacancy Transparency*, June 10, 2021. The 2019 OIG publication found that vacancy numbers for VA medical facilities were unreliable. VA did not disclose that its medical facility vacancy numbers were overstated, which was attributed to inconsistent position management in HR Smart. The 2021 OIG report reported, "VA continues to experience challenges reconciling its position data."

agreed with OIG that the June suspense date is not a legislative requirement and that VA could clarify the scope of information presented in each annual report.

VA's Procedures Defining Vacancy Data Sources Did Not Match Published Quarterly Reports

HRA/OSP developed a standard operating procedure to document the approach and definitions used in the quarterly MISSION Act reports. However, the review team found that the vacancy data source listed in the published staffing and vacancy reports differed from the sources identified in the procedures guiding that component. The published reports identified HR Smart as the sole data source, whereas the procedure stated that data fields for the vacancy information were populated using HR Smart, USA Staffing recruitment data, and the VA budget operating plans. In April 2024, the HRA/OSP manpower management service director agreed to update the data source notes in the published reports. Beginning with the report published in June 2024, VA updated the vacancy data sources. The review team confirmed this information matched the data sources listed in the standard operating procedure.

Conclusion

VA complied with requirements of the MISSION Act and the Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act by reporting data on onboard personnel, gains and losses, vacancies, and time-to-hire. However, action is needed to ensure VA properly meets requirements of the published annual reports. VA can further improve the transparency of published data by clarifying the approach used to assemble the staffing and vacancy reports and establishing a date range for the annual reports. VA has been responsive to recommendations from previous OIG reports and has continued to improve its staffing and vacancy reports.

Recommendation

To improve the administration of VA's staffing and vacancy reporting, the OIG made the following recommendation to the assistant secretary for human resources and administration/operations, security, and preparedness:

1. Ensure that annual reports to Congress include the steps VA is taking to improve the onboard timeline for facilities for which the duration of the onboarding process exceeds the metrics laid out in the Veterans Health Administration's time-to-hire model, or successor model, as required by section 3008(b) of the Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020.

VA Management Comments

The assistant secretary for HRA/OSP concurred with the recommendation and provided a corrective action plan. Although not required, VHA and VBA also provided concurrence with the draft report. Appendixes E, F, and G provide the full text of comments from the assistant secretary for HRA/OSP, the under secretary for health, and the under secretary for benefits. The assistant secretary for HRA/OSP committed to ensuring future annual reports include the steps taken to improve the onboarding timeline.

OIG Response

The corrective action plan from the assistant secretary for HRA/OSP is responsive to the intent of the recommendation. The OIG will monitor implementation of the planned action and will close the recommendation when VA provides sufficient evidence of adequate progress in addressing the identified issue.

Appendix A: Scope and Methodology

Scope

The review team conducted its work from February through July 2024. The team examined the VA's annual reports for 2022 and 2023, as well as eight executive summaries and quarterly iterations of VA staffing and vacancy data posted on VA's public website:

- Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 Quarter 3 data as of June 30, 2022, posted August 31, 2022
- FY 2022 Quarter 4 data as of September 30, 2022, posted December 5, 2022
- FY 2023 Quarter 1 data as of December 31, 2022, posted March 8, 2023
- FY 2023 Quarter 2 data as of March 31, 2023, posted June 9, 2023
- FY 2023 Quarter 3 data as of June 30, 2023, posted August 28, 2023
- FY 2023 Quarter 4 data as of September 30, 2023, posted December 15, 2023
- FY 2024 Quarter 1 data as of December 31, 2023, posted March 15, 2024
- FY 2024 Quarter 2 data as of March 31, 2024, posted June 7, 2024
- Annual Report 2022, posted June 13, 2022
- Annual Report 2023, posted August 1, 2023

Methodology

The team identified and reviewed applicable laws; Office of Personnel Management (OPM) guidance; and Human Resources and Administration/Operations, Security, and Preparedness's (HRA/OSP) methodology for obtaining the staffing and vacancy data. The team interviewed relevant HRA/OSP and Veterans Health Administration (VHA) staff. The team reviewed publicly released staffing and vacancy information, including annual reports and quarterly publications, and data definitions.

Data Reliability

The review team did not evaluate the reliability of computer-processed data or use VA's staffing and vacancy reporting data to support the findings or conclusions. The review team accepted VA's data and assessed the presentation of the reported figures for compliance and transparency without performing substantive analyses or testing the data's accuracy. Therefore, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) does not make any claims about the validity of the information VA published.

Government Standards

The OIG conducted this review in accordance with the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency's *Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation*.

Appendix B: VA MISSION Act of 2018, Section 505

SEC. 505. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS PERSONNEL TRANSPARENCY.

(a) PUBLICATION OF STAFFING AND VACANCIES.—

(1) WEBSITE REQUIRED.—Subject to paragraph (2) and not later than 90 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall make publicly available on an Internet website of the Department of Veterans Affairs the following information, which shall, subject to subparagraph (D), be displayed by departmental component or, in the case of information relating to Veterans Health Administration positions, by medical facility:

(A) The number of personnel encumbering positions.

(B) The number of accessions and separation actions processed during the quarter preceding the date of the publication of information.

(C) The number of vacancies, by occupation.

(D) The percentage of new hires for the Department who were hired within the time-to-hire target of the Office of Personnel Management, disaggregated by administration.

(2) EXCEPTIONS.—The Secretary may withhold from publication under paragraph (1) information relating to law enforcement, information security, or such positions in the Department that the Secretary determines to be sensitive.

(3) UPDATE OF INFORMATION.—The Secretary shall update the information on the website required under paragraph (1) on a quarterly basis.

(4) TREATMENT OF CONTRACTOR POSITIONS.—Any Department of Veterans Affairs position that is filled with a contractor may not be treated as a Department position for purposes of the information required to be published under paragraph (1).

(5) INSPECTOR GENERAL REVIEW.—On a semi-annual basis, the Inspector General of the Department shall review the administration of the website required under paragraph (1) and make recommendations relating to the improvements of such administration.

(b) REPORT TO CONGRESS.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to Congress an annual report on the steps the Department is taking to achieve full staffing capacity. Each such report shall include the amount of additional funds necessary to enable the Department to reach full staffing capacity.

Appendix C: Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020, Section 3008

SEC. 3008. EXPANSION OF QUARTERLY UPDATE OF INFORMATION ON STAFFING AND VACANCIES AT FACILITIES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS TO INCLUDE INFORMATION ON DURATION OF HIRING PROCESS.

(a) QUARTERLY UPDATE.—Subsection (a)(1) of section 505 of the VA MISSION Act of 2018 (Public Law 115–182; 38 U.S.C. 301 note) is amended by adding at the end the following new subparagraph:

“(E) Beginning with any update under paragraph (3) on or after the date of the enactment of the Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020, the following:

“(i) For employees appointed under paragraphs (1) and (3) of section 7401 of title 38, United States Code, the number of employees for which the duration of the process from validation of vacancy to receipt of official offer and notification of actual start date exceeds the metrics laid out in the Time to Hire Model of the Veterans Health Administration, or successor model.

“(ii) The percentage of employees who are described in clause (i) compared to all employees appointed under paragraphs (1) and (3) of section 7401 of such title during the same period.

“(iii) The average number of days potential hires or new hires appointed under paragraphs (1) and (3) of section 7401 of such title spent in each phase of the Time to Hire Model, or successor model.”

(b) ANNUAL REPORT.—Subsection (b) of such section is amended, in the first sentence, by adding before the period at the end the following: “and to improve the onboard timeline for facilities for which the duration of the onboarding process exceeds the metrics laid out in the Time to Hire Model of the Veterans Health Administration, or successor model”.

Appendix D: Continuing Appropriations Act, 2021 and Other Extensions Act, Section 5108

SEC. 5108. INSPECTOR GENERAL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS REPORT ON ADMINISTRATION OF INTERNET WEBSITE ON STAFFING AND VACANCIES.

Not later than October 31, 2022, and October 31, 2024, and as frequently thereafter as the Inspector General of the Department of Veterans Affairs considers appropriate, the Inspector General shall—

- (1) review the administration of the internet website required by section 505(a)(1) of the VA MISSION Act of 2018 (Public Law 115–182; 132 Stat. 1477; 38 U.S.C. 301 note);
- (2) develop recommendations for such legislative or administrative action as the Inspector General considers appropriate for such administration; and
- (3) submit to the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs of the House of Representatives a report on—
 - (A) the findings of the Inspector General with respect to the most recent review conducted under paragraph (1); and
 - (B) the recommendations most recently developed under paragraph (2).

Appendix E: VA Management Comments, Assistant Secretary for HRA/OSP

Department of Veterans Affairs Memorandum

Date: August 23, 2024

From: Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration/Operations, Security, and Preparedness (006)

Subj: Response to Draft Report: Action Needed to Ensure VA Meets Staffing and Vacancy Reporting Requirements under the MISSION Act of 2018 (Project Number 2024-01170-AE-0046)

To: Assistant Inspector General for Audits and Evaluations (52)

1. Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) draft report on Action Needed to Ensure VA Meets Staffing and Vacancy Reporting Requirements under the MISSION Act of 2018. The Office of Human Resources and Administration/Operations, Security, and Preparedness (HRA/OSP) concurs with recommendation 1 made to the Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration/Operations, Security, and Preparedness and provides an action plan in the attachment.
2. HRA/OSP appreciates OIG's assistance in identifying an opportunity to improve onboarding processes and activities. HRA/OSP commits to ensuring future annual reports include the steps HRA/OSP is taking to improve the onboarding timeline.

<i>The OIG removed point of contact information prior to publication.</i>

(Original signed by)

Cassandra M. Law

Attachment

Attachment

Department of Veterans Affairs

Action Plan

OIG Draft Report, VA's Staffing and Vacancy Reporting under the MISSION Act of 2018

(OIG Project Number 2024-01170-AE-0046)

Recommendation 1. Ensure that annual reports to Congress include the steps VA is taking to improve the onboard timeline for facilities for which the duration of the onboarding process exceeds the metrics laid out in the Veterans Health Administration's time-to-hire model, or successor model, as required by section 3008(b) of the Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) commits to ensuring future annual reports include the steps the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) is taking to improve the onboarding timeline. VHA included this requirement in the 2021 and 2022 versions of the report. VHA continued to improve onboarding processes and activities throughout 2023; unfortunately, VHA inadvertently omitted a summary of these efforts from the 2023 report. VHA has included a summary of onboarding improvement efforts in the 2024 annual report.

Status: In Progress Target Completion Date: September 30, 2024

*For accessibility, the original format of this appendix has been modified
to comply with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended.*

Appendix F: VA Management Comments, Under Secretary for Health

Department of Veterans Affairs Memorandum

Date: August 8, 2024

From: Under Secretary for Health (10)

Subj: Office of Inspector General (OIG) Draft Report, Review of VA's Staffing and Vacancy Reporting under the MISSION Act of 2018. (VIEWS 11988684)

To: Assistant Inspector General for Audits and Evaluations (52)

1. Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on OIG's draft report on Review of VA's Staffing and Vacancy Reporting under the MISSION Act of 2018. The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) concurs with recommendation 1 made to the Under Secretary for Health and provides an action plan in the attachment.
2. VHA appreciates OIG's assistance in identifying an opportunity to improve onboarding processes and activities. VHA commits to ensuring future annual reports include the steps VHA is taking to improve the onboarding timeline.

<i>The OIG removed point of contact information prior to publication.</i>

(Original signed by)

Shereef Elnahal M.D., MBA

Attachment

Attachment

VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION (VHA)

Action Plan

OIG Draft Report, VA's Staffing and Vacancy Reporting under the MISSION Act of 2018

(OIG Project Number 2024-01170-AE-0046)

Recommendation 1. Ensure that annual reports to Congress include the steps VA is taking to improve the onboard timeline for facilities for which the duration of the onboarding process exceeds the metrics laid out in the Veterans Health Administration's time-to-hire model, or successor model, as required by section 3008(b) of the Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020.

VHA Comments: Concur

VHA commits to ensuring future annual reports include the steps VHA is taking to improve the onboarding timeline. VHA included this requirement in the 2021 and 2022 versions of the report. VHA continued to improve onboarding processes and activities throughout 2023; unfortunately, VHA inadvertently omitted a summary of these efforts from the 2023 report. VHA has included a summary of onboarding improvement efforts in the 2024 annual report.

Status: In Progress Target Completion Date: September 30, 2024

*For accessibility, the original format of this appendix has been modified
to comply with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended.*

Appendix G: VA Management Comments, Under Secretary for Benefits

Department of Veterans Affairs Memorandum

Date: August 5, 2024

From: Under Secretary for Benefits (20)

Subj: Office of Inspector General (OIG) Draft Report - Review of VA's Staffing and Vacancy Reporting under the MISSION Act of 2018 [Project No. 2024-01170-AE-0046]

To: Assistant Inspector General for Audits and Evaluations (52)

1. Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the OIG draft report: Review of VA's Staffing and Vacancy Reporting under the MISSION Act of 2018. Where Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) is mentioned, OIG references VBA's information accurately, and VBA takes no issue with the information in the report. VBA appreciates the opportunity to review the draft report and concurs without comment.

The OIG removed point of contact information prior to publication.

(Original signed by)

Joshua Jacobs

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