

Why GAO Did This Study

Since 2007, DOD and VA have jointly operated IDES—which is intended to expedite benefits for injured servicemembers. IDES replaced the departments' separate processes for evaluating servicemembers for fitness and disability. Initially a pilot at 3 military treatment facilities, IDES is now in place at military treatment facilities worldwide. In previous reports, GAO identified a number of challenges as IDES expanded to more facilities, including staffing shortages and difficulty meeting timeliness goals.

In light of IDES' expansion, GAO was asked to examine: (1) the extent to which DOD and VA are meeting IDES timeliness and servicemember satisfaction performance goals, and (2) steps the agencies are taking to improve IDES performance. GAO analyzed IDES timeliness and customer satisfaction data, visited six IDES sites with varying performance, and interviewed DOD and VA officials.

What GAO Recommends

To improve monitoring of IDES timeliness and satisfaction, GAO recommends that DOD and VA work together to (1) develop plans for completing the ongoing business process review and implementing any resulting recommendations and (2) improve the accuracy of case information at the point of data entry; and that (3) DOD consider alternative approaches to measuring satisfaction. DOD and VA concurred with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-12-676](#). For more information, contact Daniel Bertoni at (202) 512-7215 or bertonid@gao.gov.

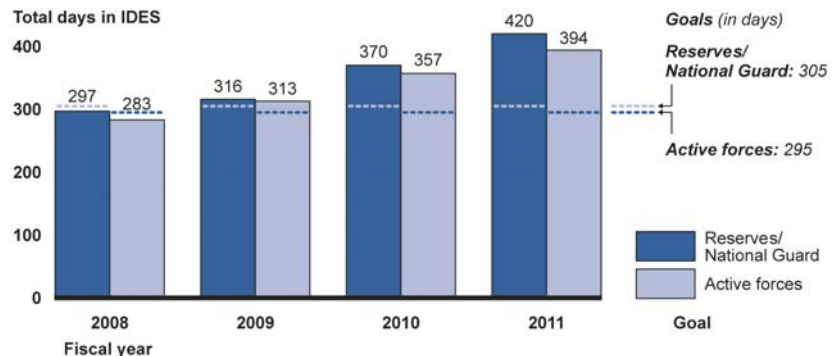
MILITARY DISABILITY SYSTEM

Improved Monitoring Needed to Better Track and Manage Performance

What GAO Found

Case processing times under the Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES) have increased over time, and measures of servicemember satisfaction have shortcomings. Since 2008, annual average processing times for IDES cases have steadily climbed, while the percentage of cases meeting established timeliness goals declined. Average case processing times reached 394 and 420 days for active and reserve component members in fiscal year 2011—compared to goals of 295 and 305 days, respectively, and just 19 percent of active duty and 18 percent of guard or reserve servicemembers completed the process and received benefits within established goals. Of the four phases comprising IDES, the medical evaluation board phase increasingly fell short of timeliness goals, while the physical evaluation board phase, although meeting goals, was taking increasingly more time to complete. With respect to servicemember satisfaction with the IDES process, GAO found shortcomings in how these data are collected and reported, such as unduly limiting who is eligible to receive a survey and computing average satisfaction scores in a manner that may overstate them. Department of Defense (DOD) officials told GAO they are considering alternatives for gauging satisfaction with the process.

Timeliness for IDES Cases Resulting in VA Benefits (by year case completed)



Source: GAO analysis of DOD and VA data.

DOD and Veterans Affairs (VA) are taking steps to improve IDES performance, but progress to date is uneven and it is too early to assess their overall impact. For example, VA increased resources for completing exams and disability ratings while the Army is hiring additional staff for its medical evaluation boards. VA has met exam timeliness goals in the past several months, but other resources have yet to translate into lower processing times. DOD and VA are pursuing system upgrades so that staff and managers at IDES facilities can better track and manage the progress of servicemembers' cases. IDES officials have been working with the military services to correct case data that were inaccurately entered into VA's IDES tracking system, but have not yet identified a permanent solution to improve the accuracy of data input. Finally, DOD, with VA's assistance, is in the early stages of an in-depth review of the entire IDES process and its supporting IT systems. This effort is intended to improve understanding of how each step contributes to overall processing times and identify opportunities to streamline the process and supporting systems. However, timeframes for completing the review or issuing recommendations have yet to be established.