

GAO@100 Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-21-395](#), a report to congressional addressees

Why GAO Did This Study

As the nation's largest integrated health care system, VA has significant resources to respond to large-scale disasters and emergencies requiring a public health response. As a part of the nation's federal response to COVID-19, FEMA tasked VA to provide emergency resources to support states, territories, tribes, and other federal agencies through mission assignments. The CARES Act included a provision for GAO to report on the ongoing monitoring and oversight efforts related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This report describes (1) how VA determines its capacity to accept mission assignments and (2) the number and types of mission assignments VA conducted from March 2020 through February 2021, among other objectives.

GAO interviewed VA officials and analyzed documents related to VA's civilian health care response to COVID-19, including VA's mission assignments from March 2020 through February 2021. GAO also interviewed FEMA and Department of Health and Human Services officials to obtain information on the interagency coordination efforts to assign and conduct mission assignments.

GAO provided a draft of this report to VA, FEMA, and the Department of Health and Human Services for comment. VA and FEMA provided technical comments only, which GAO incorporated as appropriate, and the Department of Health and Human Services did not provide any comments.

View [GAO-21-395](#). For more information, contact Debra Draper at (202) 512-7114 or draperd@gao.gov.

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COVID-19 PANDEMIC

VA Provides Health Care Assistance to Civilians as Part of the Federal Response

What GAO Found

As part of its federal response to COVID-19, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) participates in a multiagency council, which includes the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The council reviews requests for emergency resources; upon approval by the council, these requests become mission assignments issued by FEMA. To determine its capacity to accept mission assignments from FEMA, VA consults with its regional networks and medical facilities (see figure).

How VA Accepts and Conducts Mission Assignments in Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

Federal agencies coordinate approval of mission assignments

Council, including VA, FEMA, and other federal agencies

This multiagency council reviews requests for emergency resources from state, territorial, and tribal governments and federal agencies, and approves mission assignments.

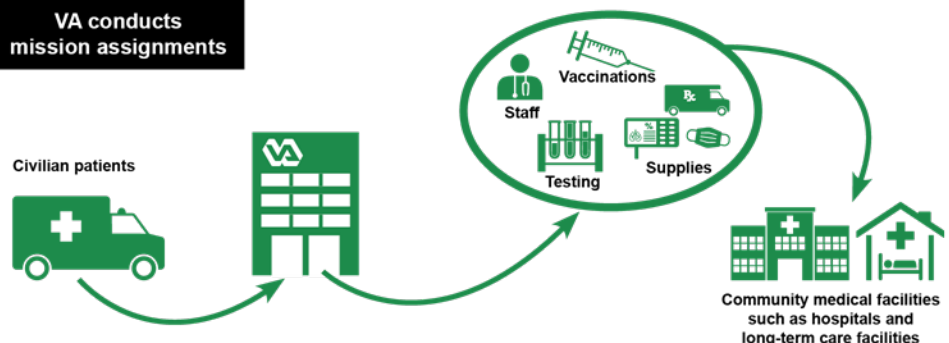
VA determines capacity to provide assistance



VA regional networks and medical facilities report on available resources.

If VA can fulfill a request for assistance, the agency accepts a mission assignment from FEMA.

VA conducts mission assignments



Legend: FEMA= Federal Emergency Management Agency; VA= Department of Veterans Affairs.

Source: GAO analysis of VA information. | [GAO-21-395](#)

From March 2020 through February 2021, VA conducted 117 mission assignments across 38 states, one territory, and four tribes in response to COVID-19. The most common types of assistance provided were deploying VA staff to help treat patients at community medical facilities and providing inpatient care to civilians at VA medical facilities.