



Award Winning Federal Audits:
Reviewing DOD's Oversight of the Accuracy of
Behavioral Health Provider Information in
TRICARE Directories

Presentation for Regional Intergovernmental Audit Forum,
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Overview

- Background on DOD's TRICARE program
- DHA's oversight of the directories' accuracy
- GAO's covert calling to behavioral health provider listings
- Methodology challenges

Background: TRICARE

- DOD offers a full range of medical care and services to over 9 million active-duty service members, retirees, and their eligible family members through TRICARE
- Beneficiaries can obtain care in military treatment facilities or through civilian providers
- DOD's Defense Health Agency (DHA) manages and oversees TRICARE
 - DHA also oversees Managed Care Support Contractors (contractors) who manage care through regional TRICARE networks of civilian providers

Background: TRICARE Regions in 2023

- Two regions: TRICARE East and TRICARE West
- The Mid-American IAF and Midwestern IAF:

State	Region
Illinois	East*
Indiana	East
Iowa	West
Kansas	West
Michigan	East
Minnesota	West
Missouri	Mostly West
Nebraska	West
Ohio	East
Wisconsin	East*

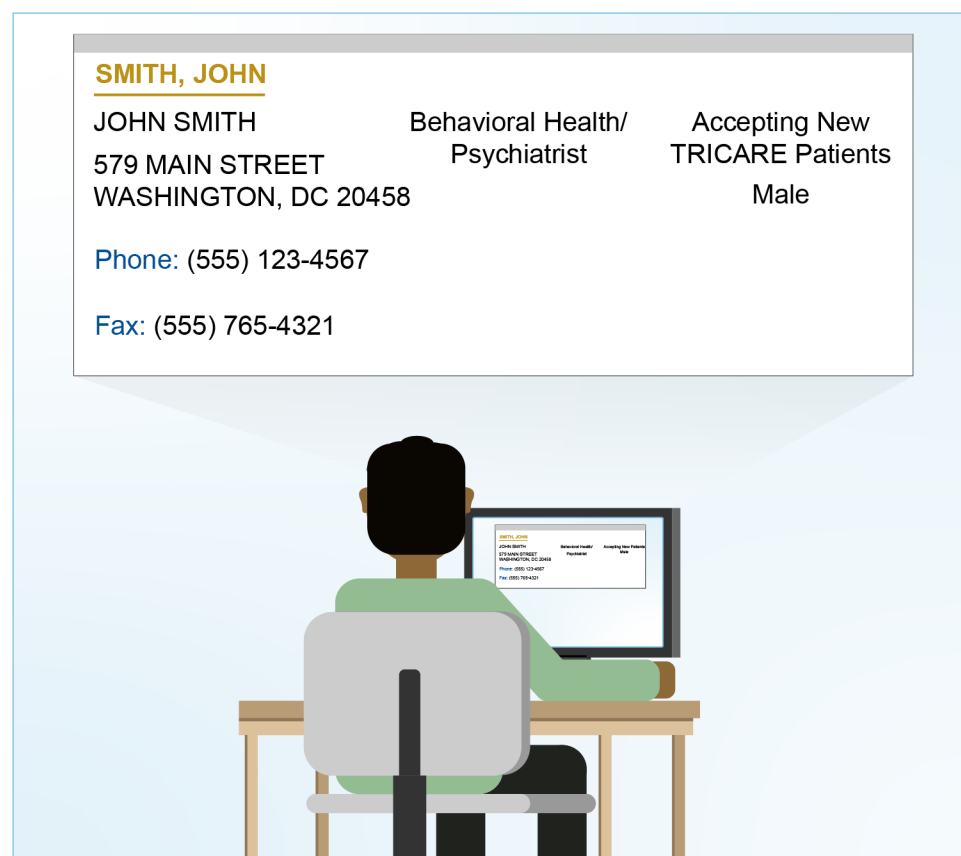
- *Under the current generation of contracts, which started in January 2025, several states, including Illinois and Wisconsin, transferred to the West region

Background: Behavioral Health Care for TRICARE Beneficiaries

- Access to behavioral health care is paramount for TRICARE beneficiaries, as demand for behavioral health care has increased among active-duty service members and their families
- To help TRICARE beneficiaries identify behavioral health and other providers, each of the TRICARE contractors in TRICARE's East and West regions are required to post online directories of providers within their networks

Background: TRICARE Network Provider Directories

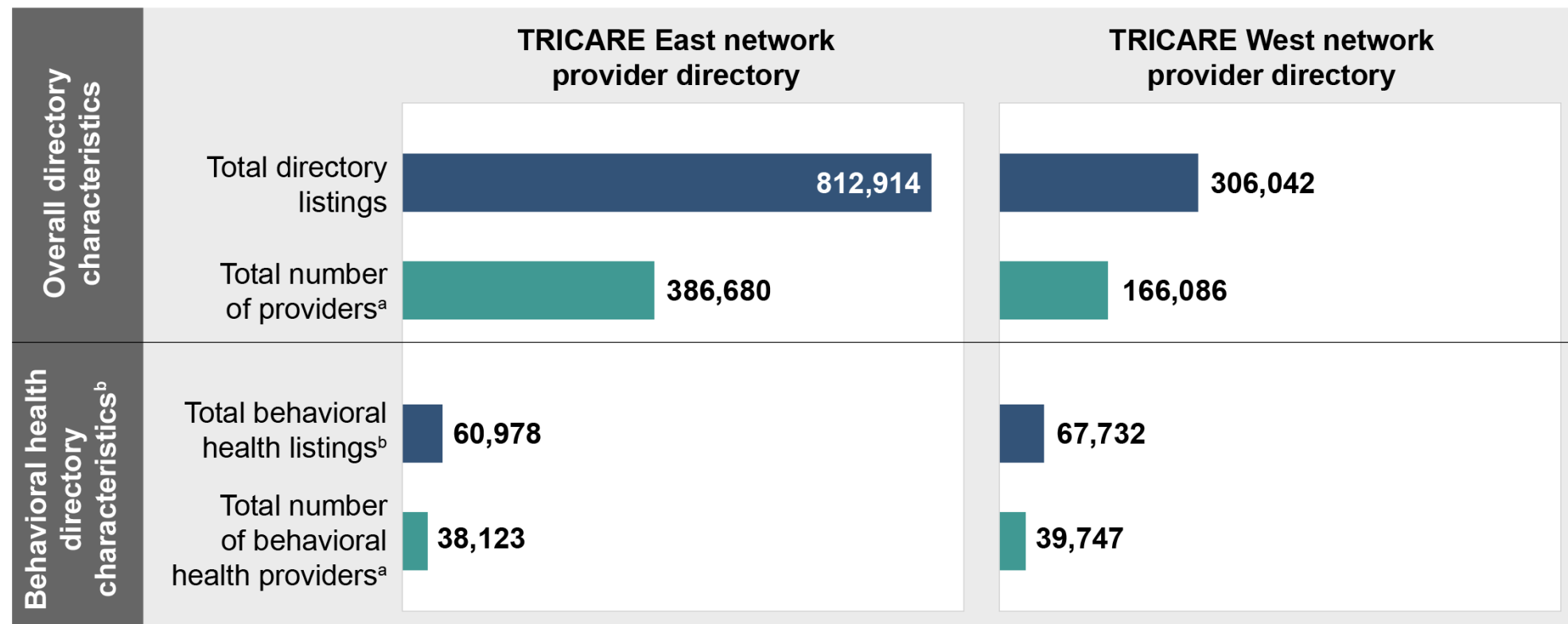
- At the time of our review, the TRICARE contracts required that the provider listing include
 - Provider name
 - Gender
 - Location address
 - Phone number
 - Fax number
 - Specialty
 - Sub-specialty (if applicable)
 - Provider acceptance of new TRICARE patients



Source: GAO. | GAO-24-106588

Background: Behavioral Health Providers in the TRICARE Network Directories

TRICARE Network Provider Directory Listing Characteristics, by TRICARE Contractor, as of Early June 2023



Source: GAO analysis of TRICARE network provider directories. | GAO-24-106588

DOD's Oversight of the Accuracy of the TRICARE Network Directories

- At the time of our review in 2023, TRICARE contracts had accuracy standards requiring a specific percentage of network provider listings are accurate
- To ensure accuracy, DHA officials monitor the contractors' required monthly audits of a random sample of all provider listings

GAO's Covert Calls to Behavioral Health Provider Listings

- Information on the accuracy of behavioral health provider listings, specifically, was not available
- As such, we conducted covert calls posing as a TRICARE beneficiary to a random sample of behavioral health providers in each directory dataset



Source: Delmaine Donson/peopleimages.com/stock.adobe.com



GAO's Covert Calls to Behavioral Health Provider Listings: Methodology

In order to determine a generalizable estimate of the accuracy of all behavioral health provider listings in each region, we:

Obtained point-in-time datasets of the two directories, from early June 2023

Selected a random sample of behavioral health provider listings from each dataset

Conducted covert calls, posing as TRICARE beneficiaries, in July and August 2023

GAO's Covert Calls to Behavioral Health Provider Listings: Findings

- We estimated that most of the behavioral health listings in the TRICARE network directories at the time of our review would be considered inaccurate according to the contractual definition for an accurate provider listing at that time:
 - About 85 percent (± 5.3 percent at the 95 percent confidence level) of the behavioral health provider listings in the TRICARE East contractor's network provider directory
 - About 79 percent (± 6.2 percent at the 95 percent confidence level) of the behavioral health provider listings in the TRICARE West contractor's network provider directory

GAO's Covert Calls to Behavioral Health Provider Listings: Recommendations to DOD



We made two recommendations to DOD

- (1) assess the accuracy of behavioral health provider listings and ensure it is comparable to the overall directory accuracy, and
- (2) periodically monitor the accuracy of those listings



As of March 2025, DOD is taking actions on both recommendations

Methodology Challenges

Defining “accurate,” “inaccurate,” and “unreachable”




How many times to call or leave voicemail

- How to pivot when a provider’s office called back



Developing a process for sufficiently documenting and verifying each covert call



Accounting for difference in directory dataset pull dates and when we conducted covert calls



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