

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-17-562T](#), a testimony before the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

The federal government faces a long-term, unsustainable fiscal path based on an imbalance between federal revenues and spending. While addressing this structural imbalance will require fiscal policy changes, in the near term opportunities exist in a number of areas to improve this situation, including where federal programs or activities are fragmented, overlapping, or duplicative.

To call attention to these opportunities, Congress included a provision in statute for GAO to identify and report on federal programs, agencies, offices, and initiatives—either within departments or government-wide—that have duplicative goals or activities. GAO also identifies areas that are fragmented or overlapping and additional opportunities to achieve cost savings or enhance revenue collection. GAO's 2017 annual report is its seventh in this series (GAO-17-491SP).

This statement discusses:

- new issues GAO identifies in its 2017 report;
- the progress made in addressing actions GAO identified in its 2011 to 2016 reports; and
- examples of open actions directed to Congress or executive branch agencies.

To identify what actions exist to address these issues, GAO reviewed and updated prior work, including recommendations for executive action and matters for congressional consideration.

View [GAO-17-562T](#). For more information, contact J. Christopher Mihm at (202) 512-6806 or mihmj@gao.gov or Jessica Lucas-Judy at (202) 512-9110 or lucasjudy@gao.gov.

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GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS

Opportunities to Reduce Fragmentation, Overlap, and Duplication and Achieve Other Financial Benefits

What GAO Found

GAO's 2017 annual report identifies 79 new actions that Congress and executive branch agencies can take to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of government in 29 new areas. Of these, GAO identified 15 areas in which there is evidence of fragmentation, overlap, or duplication. For example, GAO found that the Army and Air Force need to improve the management of their virtual training programs to avoid fragmentation and better acquire and integrate virtual devices into training to potentially save tens of millions of dollars. GAO also identified 14 areas to reduce the cost of government operations or enhance revenues. For example, GAO found that the Department of Energy could potentially save tens of billions of dollars by improving its analysis of options for storing defense and commercial high-level nuclear waste and fuel.

Congress and executive branch agencies have made progress in addressing the 645 actions that GAO identified from 2011 to 2016. Congressional and executive branch efforts to address these actions over the past 6 years have resulted in roughly \$136 billion in financial benefits, of which \$75 billion has accrued and at least an additional \$61 billion in estimated benefits is projected to accrue in future years.

Status of 2011–2016 Actions as of March, 2017

| Status | 115 th Congress number of actions (percentage) | Executive branch number of actions (percentage) | Total number of actions (percentage) |
|---------------------|---|---|--|
| Addressed | 36 (38%) | 293 (53%) | 329 (51%) |
| Partially addressed | 9 (9%) | 192 (35%) | 201 (31%) |
| Not addressed | 50 (53%) | 65 (12%) | 115 (18%) |
| Total | 95 (100%) | 550 (100%) | 645 (100%) |

Source: GAO. | GAO-17-562T

Further steps are needed to fully address the remaining actions GAO identified. GAO estimates that tens of billions of additional dollars would be saved should Congress and executive branch agencies fully address the 395 actions that remain open, including the 79 new actions GAO identified in 2017. While these open actions span the government, a substantial number of them are directed to seven agencies: the Departments of Defense, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Veterans Affairs, the Internal Revenue Service, Office of Management and Budget, and the Social Security Administration. For example, the Department of Health and Human Services could potentially save over a billion dollars annually by better aligning its payments to hospitals for the uncompensated care they provide to uninsured and low-income patients.