

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-23-106818](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, Committee on Energy and Commerce, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Broadband internet has become critical to daily life. It provides a digital lifeline to education, work, and healthcare. The federal government continues to invest billions of dollars to close the digital divide, and the President set a goal for universal broadband access by 2030.

This statement discusses: 1) fragmentation and overlap among federal broadband programs, and 2) the lack of a national strategy for broadband, among other objectives.

This statement is based primarily on GAO's May 2022 report on federal broadband programs ([GAO-22-104611](#)). In addition, this statement provides an update on the actions that the National Telecommunications and Information Administration and the Executive Office of the President have taken in response to GAO's recommendations.

What GAO Recommends

GAO made three recommendations in its May 2022 report, including that (1) the National Telecommunications and Information Administration should identify key statutory limitations to broadband program alignment, develop legislative proposals as appropriate, and provide a report on these topics to Congress; and (2) the Executive Office of the President should develop and implement a national broadband strategy. As of May 2023, these recommendations have not been implemented.

View [GAO-23-106818](#). For more information, contact Andrew Von Ah at (202) 512-2834 or vonaha@gao.gov.

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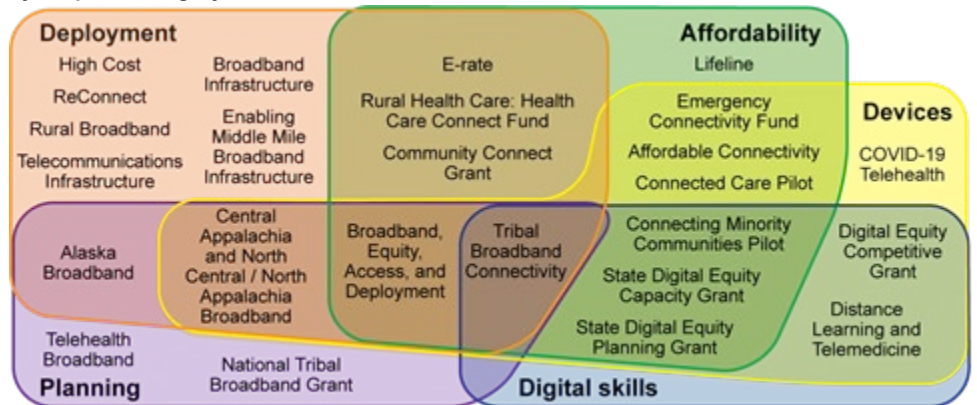
BROADBAND

A National Strategy Needed to Coordinate Fragmented, Overlapping Federal Programs

What GAO Found

Federal broadband efforts are fragmented and overlapping, with more than 133 funding programs administered by 15 agencies. Among these programs, 25 have broadband as their main purpose, and 13 of those programs overlap because they can each be used for the purpose of broadband deployment (see fig.). Having numerous broadband programs can be helpful to address a multifaceted issue like broadband access, but this fragmentation and overlap can lead to the risk of duplicative support. However, determining whether program overlap results in duplicative support can be challenging.

The Mosaic of 25 Federal Programs with Broadband as a Main Purpose, as of November 2021, by Purpose Category



Source: GAO analysis. | GAO-23-106818

Stakeholders identified several challenges associated with using fragmented, overlapping broadband programs—such as administrative complexities—that can make participating difficult for the communities most in need. Effective coordination can help, but programmatic differences have limited agencies' ability to better align programs, according to agency officials. Without identifying the key areas where statutory provisions limit beneficial program alignment—and developing legislative proposals as appropriate—Congress may lack insight into potential beneficial legislative changes and agencies may continue to face challenges in collaborating to help people access broadband.

The federal government has used mechanisms to coordinate federal broadband programs, but no current national strategy exists with clear roles, goals, objectives, and performance measures. The Executive Office of the President, through the National Economic Council, and numerous agencies have increasingly worked to coordinate fragmented and overlapping federal broadband programs. GAO has reported that strategies to coordinate programs that address cross-cutting issues of broad national need can help prevent the potential negative effects of fragmented and overlapping federal programs. A national broadband strategy, led by the Executive Office of the President, could help coordination across the federal agencies overseeing broadband programs. Without such a strategy, federal broadband efforts continue to risk overlap and duplication of effort.