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**GAO**

**Program Evaluation and Methodology  
Division**

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**Program Evaluation  
and Methodology Issue  
Area**

**Active Assignments**

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# Foreword

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This report was prepared primarily to inform Congressional members and key staff of ongoing assignments in the General Accounting Office's Program Evaluation and Methodology issue area. This report contains assignments that were ongoing as of September 3, 1996, and presents a brief background statement and a list of key questions to be answered on each assignment. The report will be issued quarterly.

This report was compiled from information available in GAO's internal management information systems. Because the information was downloaded from computerized data bases intended for internal use, some information may appear in abbreviated form.

If you have questions or would like additional information about assignments listed, please contact Kwaicheung Chan, Director, Program Evaluation in the Physical System Area on (202) 512-3092; or Mary Hamilton, Director, Program Evaluation in the Human Services Area on (202) 512-2900.

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## *Program Evaluation and Methodology*

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### **EXISTING PROGRAMS/POLICIES**

**TITLE: FDA'S LAYERS OF SAFETY FOR THE BLOOD SUPPLY (973418)**

**BACKGROUND :** The Food and Drug Administration has instituted controls over the collection and distribution of blood products which it has termed "layers of safety." These steps are designed to ensure that contaminated blood and blood products are screened from the nation's blood supply. Nevertheless, patients continue to receive transfusions of infected blood.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** (1) What policies and procedures has FDA implemented to ensure that safeguards are in place, and what problems exist in the implementation of each of the five layers of safety? (2) what are the current risk estimates of contracting infectious diseases or other serious health complications from the transfusion of blood products?

**TITLE: EPIDEMIOLOGY OF ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE (973430)**

**BACKGROUND :** Millions of Americans are afflicted with Alzheimer's disease, and the number is expected to rise with the projected increase in the elderly population. Their care requires extensive medical and social resources.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** (1)What statistics are available on Alzheimer's disease in the U.S.? (2)What federal programs support research? (3)What types of clinical trials and outcomes research studies are conducted in the U.S. and overseas? (4)Identify promising approaches to care for Alzheimer's patients.

**TITLE: COST-EFFECTIVENESS OF MEDICARE PREPAYMENT SCREENS (973431)**

**BACKGROUND :** GAO has found that most claims are automatically paid without determining the medical necessity of the procedure. At the same time, very little is known about the cost-effectiveness of the pre-payment screens, including the effectiveness of provider profiling in this regard. This study will address these questions.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** 1)How rigorous are the methods used by HCFA to evaluate cost-effectiveness of prepayment screens? 2)Do these screens impact providers most responsible for denials? 3)How do reversal rates for appealed claims influence cost-effectiveness estimates?

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### **EXISTING PROGRAMS/POLICIES**

**TITLE: IDENTIFYING POCKETS OF UNDERIMMUNIZED CHILDREN (973435)**

**BACKGROUND :** "Vaccines for Children: Reexamination of Program Goals and Implementation Needed to Ensure Vaccination" (PEMD-95-22) noted that the problem of underimmunization is not universal and is limited to certain population groups and areas, which are often referred to as "pockets of need." However, little is known about how to identify pockets of need.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** 1) What is the capacity of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to identify pockets of need? 2) To what extent do state Medicaid data bases have the potential to identify pockets of need? 3) To what extent do clinical assessment data bases in public health clinics have the potential to identify pockets of need?

**TITLE: COMPARISON OF COMPETITION, PRODUCTIVITY, AND PRICES IN THE DEFENSE AND CIVILIAN SECTORS (973436)**

**BACKGROUND :** DOD spends tens of billions of dollars annually on weapons procurement. Critics suggest that the cost of weapons is excessive. They attribute this, in part, to the weapons procurement process leading to a lack of productivity and competition in the defense industrial base as compared to the civilian sector.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** (1) How do competition and productivity vary within the defense industrial base and how has this changed over time? (2) How do competition, productivity, and prices vary between defense industrial base manufacturers and civilian sector industries?

**TITLE: EXAMINING COMMERCIAL AVIATION SAFETY (973437)**

**BACKGROUND :** Commercial aviation safety continues to be an urgent concern to Congress and the public. Yet, because fatal aviation accidents are relatively rare events, it is difficult to draw general lessons through quantitative analysis. Generalizations are further limited by differing safety concerns specific to each class of service (e.g., major carrier, regional airline, air taxi).

**KEY QUESTIONS :** How do safety concerns vary among different classes of commercial airline service? To what extent can existing public and private aviation safety databases be drawn upon to identify and quantify relevant aviation safety issues specific to each class?

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### **EXISTING PROGRAMS/POLICIES**

**TITLE: AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT EMPLOYMENT PROVISIONS (973795)**

**BACKGROUND :** The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) includes safeguards against discrimination in the employment of persons with disabilities including hiring, accommodations, promotions, terminations, and benefits. The impact the law has had on the lives of persons with disabilities and on businesses is unknown, but widely speculated upon.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** What have been the costs and benefits of the employment provisions of the ADA? How has the ADA changed the employment rate for persons with disabilities? How does the composition of the disabled population in the workforce compare to that of the unemployed?

**TITLE: STRUCTURE IMPLICATIONS FOR QUALITY OF HEALTH CARE (973800)**

**BACKGROUND :** The rapid movement toward managed care has profound implications for the American health care delivery system. In particular, the proportion of Medicare beneficiaries enrolled in HMOs has increased rapidly. Little is known about the implications for quality of care of this change in the medical marketplace.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** (1) What relationship exists between the level of market penetration of HMOs and the quality of care provided by hospitals during the acute phase of heart attacks for Medicare patients? (2) What relationship exists between enrollment in Medicare HMOs and the appropriateness of surgical intervention in the post-acute treatment of heart attacks?

**TITLE: SURVEY OF FEDERAL EVALUATION ROLES & RESOURCES (973810)**

**BACKGROUND :** GAO's Title VII responsibilities include informing the Congress about the nature and scope of federal program evaluation activities. New initiatives in program oversight such as the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) and delegation of program responsibility to the states may change federal evaluation roles and responsibilities.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** 1)What are the current program evaluation resources and roles in federal agencies? 2)How are block grants, budget cuts, and other initiatives expected to affect the role of federal evaluation? 3)What strategies could help to ensure that federal agencies successfully fulfill these future roles?



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### **EXISTING PROGRAMS/POLICIES**

**TITLE: FDA REVIEW TIMES: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN IND AND NDA TIMES (973812)**

**BACKGROUND :** House Commerce Committee plans to hold hearings on FDA reform in mid- to late January.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** What are the trends in FDA review times for drugs, medical devices, biologic drugs, food additives, and animal drugs?

### **PROPOSED PROGRAMS/POLICIES**

**TITLE: FUTURE STRATEGIES FOR THE DEFENSE INDUSTRIAL BASE (973421)**

**BACKGROUND :** Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, programs to support defense contractors and manufacturers in the defense industrial base (DIB) have been implemented. However, there is concern that these programs may be subsidizing uncompetitive production facilities at very high and long lasting costs.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** 1. What are the trends in overall DOD budgets and outlay expenditures over time? 2. How is the level of DOD spending linked to the productivity and financial viability of firms in the defense industrial base and competitiveness within the defense manufacturing industries.

### **QUALITY OF POLICY INFORMATION**

**TITLE: EVALUATION OF THE METHODOLOGY OF DOD'S BOTTOM-UP REVIEW (973404)**

**BACKGROUND :** The requester has asked that PEMD perform a methodological review of DOD's Bottom-Up Review and report back to him in early spring 1994.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** (1) What was the methodology of the Bottom-Up Review, and how was it applied? (2) How were major decisions made, and how were they supported by the data and analyses that were performed? (3) What were the methodology and analyses relative to the consolidation of duplicative roles and missions among the military services?

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### **QUALITY OF POLICY INFORMATION**

**TITLE: THE QUALITY OF REGULATORY IMPACT ANALYSES PRODUCED BY THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY (973438)**

**BACKGROUND :** EPA is one of the largest generators of regulations of any federal agency. EPA has been preparing regulatory impact analyses of its major regulations for more than ten years. Congress is weighing whether to broaden and/or change the role of RIAs within the regulatory development process. Yet no systematic review of the adequacy of past RIAs has been performed.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** (1) What role have regulatory impact analyses played in the rulemaking process at EPA and how costly are they? (2) How well do RIAs prepared by EPA conform to standards of quality?

**TITLE: ESTIMATING ALL IMMIGRATION STATUSES (973792)**

**BACKGROUND :** Current immigration policy issues would be informed by more accurate data on the numbers of foreign-born persons in specific immigration status categories in local areas. Government agencies do not conduct surveys to collect such data. GAO proposes to explore the feasibility of an alternative to the usual data collection and estimation methods.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** (1) What are INS and/or Census Bureau plans, if any, for collecting relevant data--and what do agencies see as the barriers to collecting such data? (2) What are the strengths and limitations of existing data collection approaches? (3) Can the proposed new method be further developed and refined to the point that its practicality is clear?

**TITLE: USE OF PROGRAM EVALUATION IN IMPLEMENTING GPRA (973806)**

**BACKGROUND :** The Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA) requires federal agencies to establish performance goals and indicators for their programs, and encourages them to incorporate program evaluations into that process. This job, which complements GGD's ongoing work, aims to examine GPRA pilots and other performance measurement.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** 1. What kinds of analytical and technical challenges are agencies experiencing as they try to develop performance measures? 1A. What program characteristics are related to encountering those challenges? 2. How have they addressed these analytic challenges? 3. Whether and how have they made use of program evaluation in this process?



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### **PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS AND QUALITY**

**TITLE: REVIEW OF THE NATIONAL IMMUNIZATION SURVEY (973441)**

**BACKGROUND :** In its FY97 budget request, the Administration has noted that the CDC's new National Immunization Survey will facilitate targeting pockets of underimmunized children.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** Key questions addressed under this request include: (1) How effective is the new National Immunization Survey in identifying pockets of underimmunized children? and (2) What costs are associated with the new survey?

**TITLE: ALZHEIMER'S RESEARCH (973442)**

**BACKGROUND :** Alzheimer's Dementia (AD) is an irreversible brain disorder more common in the elderly. Increasing millions of Americans are expected to suffer from AD disease as the population ages. Cause and cure are still unknown. GAO has been asked to review the research into proposed risk factors and the status of potential treatments in the pipeline.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** 1) What federal programs support research? 2) What types of clinical trials and outcomes research studies are conducted in the U.S. and overseas?

**TITLE: EVALUATION OF THE AIR WAR (973443)**

**KEY QUESTIONS :** (1) How well did individual weapon systems perform in pursuit of Desert Storm air campaign objectives? (2) To what degree were the goals of desert Storm achieved by air power?

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### **PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS AND QUALITY**

**TITLE: EVALUATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DOT&E (973444)**

**BACKGROUND :** Congress recently debated whether to eliminate DOT&E. The GAO was asked to assess whether this office effectively provides for independent test and evaluation of weapon systems as originally intended.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** 1) What have been the strengths and weaknesses of the organizational framework in DOD for operational testing? 2) Has the department effectively addressed the shortcomings identified in GAO's 1988 report on DOT&E? 3) What should be the operating principles of an effective and efficient operational testing and oversight function?

**TITLE: CPA SCREENING OF VIETNAMESE ASYLUM CASES (973445)**

**BACKGROUND :** The international Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) established procedures to screen and resettle or return Vietnamese boat people who are in camps of first asylum. The plan will expire June 30, 1996 and "screened out" asylum seekers are expected to be returned to Vietnam. Members of Congress are concerned that there may be individuals of interest to the U.S. in the camps.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** 1) To what extent are there selected individuals of interest to the U.S. in the first asylum camps who are screened out by the CPA program? 2) For those individuals who are of interest, was the CPA screening process conducted the way it is supposed to? If not, why? 3) What role has UNHCR played in Monitoring the Voluntary repatriation process?

**TITLE: FOOD ADDITIVES REVIEW TIME (973814)**

**BACKGROUND :** This job grows out of previous and ongoing PEMD work on FDA Review Times (973812) and focuses on Congressional concerns regarding the timeliness of food additive petition reviews.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** (1) How many food additive petitions are in the current review inventory? (2) What are the patterns, if any, of timeliness for the food additive process? (3) What impediments to timely review, if any, are identifiable in the current data base of petition review times?

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### **PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS AND QUALITY**

**TITLE: ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO POVERTY MEASURES (973823)**

**BACKGROUND :** The official poverty measure compares a family's income with a level believed necessary to purchase a minimal standard of living. This measure is basically unchanged since 1964 except for annual adjustments in the thresholds for inflation. Recently, critics proposed updating the thresholds and basing the measure on families' consumption instead.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** 1) What are the issues involved in using income and consumption approaches to measuring a family's well-being in determining their poverty status? and 2) What are the issues involved in developing contemporary poverty thresholds?

**TITLE: IMPROVING OUR ABILITY TO USE QUICK TURN-AROUND METHODS TO DO OUR WORK (973852)**

**BACKGROUND :** GAO reports have relied heavily on two data collection methods: unstructured interviews and the review of existing agency documents and records. Methods used in other fields may offer the potential to shorten the time required to do many of GAO's evaluations.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** 1) What are the most promising quick-turnaround evaluation methods? 2) How do we best disseminate these methods to GAO and government evaluators?

### **GOVERNMENT EVALUATION CAPABILITY**

**TITLE: BLOOD TRANSFUSION RISKS (973439)**

**BACKGROUND :** The Food and Drug Administration has instituted controls over the collection and distribution of blood products which it has termed "layers of safety." These steps are designed to ensure that contaminated blood and blood products are screened from the nation's blood supply. Nevertheless, patients continue to receive transfusions of infected blood.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** (1)What are the current risk estimates of contracting infectious diseases or other serious health complications from the transfusion of blood products?

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### **GOVERNMENT EVALUATION CAPABILITY**

**TITLE: RELATIVE STRENGTH OF TECHNIQUES FOR EVALUATING PERFORMANCE OF BLOCK GRANTS AND SIMILAR PROGRAMS (973822)**

**BACKGROUND :** Performance measurement and evaluation pose challenges for block grant and other programs that operate through and give flexibility to local entities. We will identify these challenges and strategies to overcome them, and will present guidance to agencies and the Congress in order to increase the utility of information reported under GPRA for this class of programs.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** (1) What programs are characterized by local flexibility and how do they vary? (2) What measurement and evaluation problems have these programs encountered? (3) What solutions have they found? (4) What are the strengths and weaknesses of these solutions? (5) How can these solutions guide future practice?

### **OTHER ISSUE AREA WORK - PEM**

**TITLE: HOME CARE WORK FORCE AND SAFEGUARDS (973434)**

**BACKGROUND :** Home and community-based care agencies serve growing numbers of functionally disabled elderly persons who require assistance with basic and instrumental activities of daily living. A variety of federal and state requirements are imposed on providers of home and community-based care to safeguard the health and well-being of clients.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** These include: (1) What federal or state requirements cover agencies or individuals offering personal care services? (2) What procedures do agency providers use to screen and evaluate employees? and (3) What is known about the quality of care offered by home care agencies and the qualifications of home care personnel?