

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-23-105399](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Broadband, or high-speed internet, is critical since everyday activities increasingly occur online, as highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet the inability to afford broadband presents barriers to access for some and contributes to the gap between those with and without access, known as the “digital divide.” As required by statute, FCC launched the Affordable Connectivity Program in December 2021 to help low-income households afford broadband, building from FCC’s May 2021 launch of the predecessor Emergency Broadband Benefit program.

GAO was asked to review FCC’s implementation of the program. This report assesses FCC’s program efforts in: (1) establishing performance goals and measures, (2) conducting outreach, and (3) managing fraud risks. GAO reviewed program documentation, including outreach materials translated into five non-English languages; analyzed enrollment data from May 2021 to September 2022; interviewed FCC officials; and compared FCC’s efforts in each area to applicable leading practices identified in prior GAO work or other federal sources.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making nine recommendations, including that FCC improve its program goals and measures, revise its language translation process, develop a consumer outreach plan, and develop and implement various processes for managing fraud risks. FCC agreed with our recommendations and described its plans to address each one.

View [GAO-23-105399](#). For more information, contact Andrew Von Ah at (202) 512-2834 or vonaha@gao.gov.

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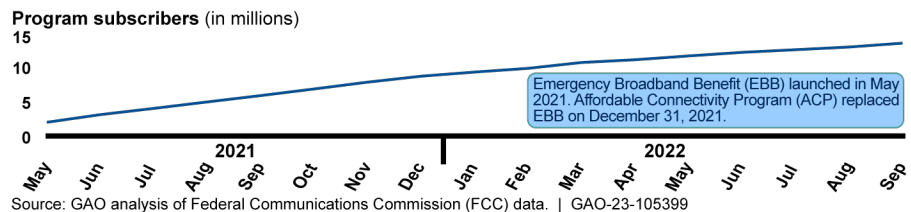
AFFORDABLE BROADBAND

FCC Could Improve Performance Goals and Measures, Consumer Outreach, and Fraud Risk Management

What GAO Found

The Federal Communications Commission’s (FCC) Affordable Connectivity Program offers eligible low-income households discounts on the cost of their broadband service and certain devices. FCC reimburses participating internet service providers for providing these discounts. Since launching, the program has grown to include over 14-million subscribers.

FCC Affordable Connectivity Program’s Subscribers, May 2021–September 2022



FCC established some performance goals and measures for the program. However, the goals and measures do not fully align with key attributes of effective performance management. For example, FCC’s goals and measures lack specificity and clearly defined targets, raising questions about how effective these goals and measures will be at helping FCC gauge the program’s achievements and identify improvements.

FCC has also engaged in various outreach efforts to raise ACP’s awareness and translated its outreach materials into non-English languages to reach eligible households with limited-English proficiency. However, GAO reviewed a selection of these materials and the process to translate them and found that they did not fully align with leading practices for consumer content or for developing translated language products. For example, the translations’ quality varied due to lack of clarity and incompleteness. Also, FCC’s translation process lacked elements that could have improved the materials, such as testing with the target audience. FCC has also not developed a plan to guide its overall outreach efforts. Quality translations are key to informing eligible households with limited-English proficiency, which may include communities FCC has indicated are important to reach. A comprehensive plan to guide its outreach efforts would help ensure funds dedicated to outreach are used most effectively.

FCC has taken steps to manage fraud risks in the program, but FCC’s efforts do not fully align with selected leading practices in GAO’s Fraud Risk Framework. For example, FCC has conducted a fraud risk assessment but has not developed an antifraud strategy to address the identified risks. It also has not developed a process to conduct such risk assessments regularly. Further, FCC has not developed processes to monitor certain antifraud controls. GAO identified weaknesses in these controls, including potential duplicate subscribers, subscribers allegedly receiving fixed broadband at PO Boxes and commercial mailboxes, and subscribers with broadband providers’ retail locations as their primary or mailing addresses. Without regular fraud risk assessments, an antifraud strategy, and sufficient monitoring of controls, FCC may not be able to effectively prevent and detect fraud in this over \$14 billion program.