

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-14-613T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Government Operations, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Autism—a developmental disorder involving communication and social impairment—is an important public health concern. From fiscal years 2008 through 2012, 12 federal agencies awarded at least \$1.4 billion to support autism research and other autism-related activities. The Combating Autism Act directed the IACC to coordinate HHS autism activities and monitor all federal autism activities. It also required the IACC to develop and annually update a strategic plan for autism research. This plan is organized into 7 research areas that contain specific objectives.

This statement is based on GAO's November 2013 report, [GAO-14-16](#), with selected updates. It discusses federal autism activities, including (1) the extent to which federal agencies fund potentially duplicative autism research, and (2) the extent to which IACC and agencies coordinate and monitor federal autism activities. GAO analyzed agencies' data and documents, and interviewed federal agency officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommended in November 2013 that HHS improve IACC data to enhance coordination and monitoring. HHS disagreed and stated its efforts were already adequate. GAO also recommended that DOD, Education, HHS, and NSF improve coordination. The agencies supported improved coordination, but most disputed that duplication occurs. GAO continues to believe the recommendations are warranted and actions needed.

View [GAO-14-613T](#). For more information, contact Marcia Crosse at (202) 512-7114 or crossem@gao.gov.

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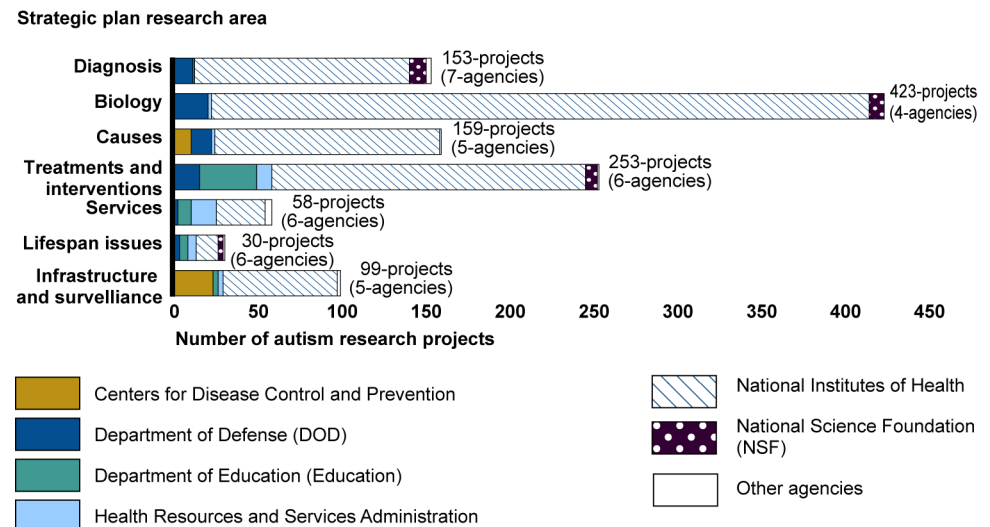
FEDERAL AUTISM ACTIVITIES

Funding and Coordination Efforts

What GAO Found

Eighty-four percent of the autism research projects funded by federal agencies had the potential to be duplicative. Of the 1,206 autism research projects funded by federal agencies from fiscal years 2008 through 2012, 1,018 projects were potentially duplicative because the projects were categorized to the same objectives in the Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee's (IACC) strategic plan. Funding similar research on the same topic is sometimes appropriate—for example, for purposes of replicating or corroborating results—but in other instances funding similar research may lead to unnecessary duplication. Each agency funded at least 1 autism research project in the same strategic plan objective as another agency and at least 4 agencies funded autism research in the same research area.

Number of Federal Agencies' Autism Research Projects Funded, by Research Area, Fiscal Years 2008 through 2012



Source: GAO analysis of data from the Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee (IACC) and federal agencies that funded autism research.

Note: Thirty-one of the 1,206 projects funded by federal agencies from fiscal years 2008 through 2012 are not included in this figure because they were not categorized to a specific research area. At the time of GAO's review, DOD had not submitted data on its fiscal year 2012 research projects, and therefore they were not included in this figure. The "other agencies" are: Administration for Children and Families, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, Environmental Protection Agency, and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Not all of these "other agencies" necessarily funded projects in every research area.

The IACC and federal agencies may have missed opportunities to coordinate and reduce the risk of duplicating effort and resources. GAO found that the IACC is not focused on the prevention of duplication, and its efforts to coordinate the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) autism research and monitor all federal autism activities were hindered by limitations with the data it collects. Apart from federal agencies' participation on the IACC, there were limited instances of agency coordination, and the agencies did not have robust or routine procedures for monitoring federal autism activities.