

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-15-69](#), a report to the Administrator, General Services Administration

Why GAO Did This Study

Today, millions of Americans use mobile devices like smartphones and tablet computers on a daily basis to communicate and obtain information. Further, due to recent technical advances in mobile technology, consumers can use these devices to carry out a broad range of activities that previously required a desktop or laptop computer—including shopping, banking, and accessing government services. Given these trends, providing government information and services “anytime, anywhere, and on any device,” has become increasingly important, particularly as some mobile users may not have any other means of online access.

GAO reviewed information on mobile users and how they access government information and services. This report describes (1) the demographics of mobile users and the factors that might be associated with the increased use of mobile devices, (2) the devices individuals are using to access government services and the challenges people face, and (3) the actions the federal government has taken to enhance access to government services via mobile devices. GAO reviewed pertinent federal legislation and guidance and conducted a review of literature; interviewed, analyzed and reviewed information from six randomly selected federal agencies; and interviewed officials from other federal agencies and consumer advocacy groups.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is not making recommendations in this report.

View [GAO-15-69](#). For more information, contact Mark Goldstein at (202) 512-2834 or GoldsteinM@gao.gov.

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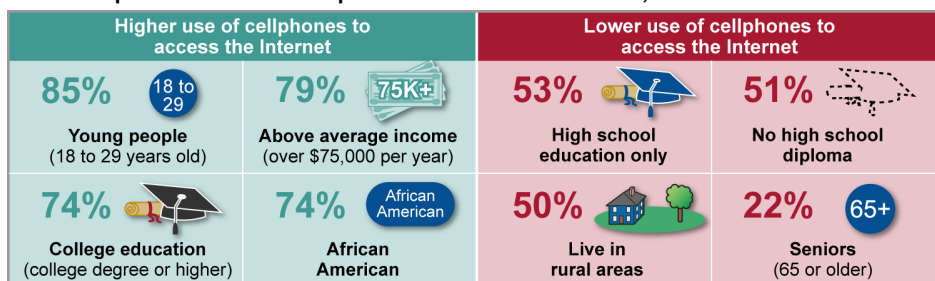
MOBILE DEVICES

Federal Agencies’ Steps to Improve Mobile Access to Government Information and Services

What GAO Found

According to Pew Research Center, in 2013, some demographic groups relied more on cellphones to access the Internet than others. Those who are young, earn more income, have a graduate degree, or are African American had the highest rate of mobile access. In contrast, according to Pew, those who used cellphones to access the Internet in 2013 at lower rates tended to be seniors, the less educated, or rural populations. Only 22 percent of seniors ages 65 and older accessed the Internet using cellphones, compared to 85 percent of young people. GAO also found that access to the Internet using cellphones has increased, primarily due to lower cost, convenience, and technical advances.

Various Populations’ Use of Cellphones to Access the Internet, 2013



Source: GAO based on Pew data. | GAO-15-69

Although desktop and laptop computers are still the primary means of access, consumers are increasingly using mobile devices to access websites with government information and services. For example, the number of individual visitors using smartphones and tablets to access the Department of the Interior’s information and services increased significantly from 57,428 visitors in 2011 to 1,206,959 in 2013. Even so, mobile Internet users reportedly face a range of challenges accessing government services online. For example, viewing any website that has not been “optimized” for mobile access—in other words, redesigned for smaller screens—can be challenging.

Federal agencies—which have more than 11,000 websites—have taken a range of actions to enhance access to information and services via mobile devices. The Office of Management and Budget, in response to the milestones laid out in its *Digital Government Strategy*, created the Digital Services Advisory Group, which—together with the General Services Administration’s Office of Citizen Services and Innovative Technology—has provided federal agencies with guidance, resources, and tools to enhance access to government services via mobile devices. In addition, five of the six agencies GAO interviewed have taken steps to improve access to their websites via mobile devices. For example, in 2012, the Department of Transportation (DOT) redesigned its main website, www.dot.gov, to provide a platform for mobile access. Three of the other agencies GAO interviewed have also redesigned websites to better accommodate mobile devices and the other two agencies have plans to do so.