

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-18-363T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

In 2010, the Coast Guard initiated an effort—known as IHIS—to replace its aging EHR system with a new system that was to modernize various health care services for its nearly 50,000 military members. However, in October 2015, the Coast Guard announced that the modernization project would be canceled.

GAO was asked to summarize its report that is being released today on the Coast Guard's actions related to its EHR modernization initiative. GAO's testimony specifically addresses Coast Guard's (1) reasons for deciding to terminate further IHIS development; (2) management and oversight actions for the discontinued project and whether lessons learned were identified; (3) current process for managing health records and the challenges it is encountering; and (4) plans for effectively implementing a new EHR system and the current status of its efforts.

In preparing the report on which this testimony is based, GAO reviewed IHIS project expenditures; analyzed key project management documentation; surveyed Coast Guard's Regional Managers and clinical staff; and interviewed key staff.

## What GAO Recommends

In the report being released today, GAO is recommending that the Coast Guard (1) expeditiously and judiciously pursue a new EHR system, and in doing so (2) ensure key processes are implemented; (3) establish project governance boards; and (4) document lessons learned from the IHIS project. The Department of Homeland Security concurred with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-18-363T](#). For more information, contact David A. Powner at (202) 512-9286 or [pownerd@gao.gov](mailto:pownerd@gao.gov).

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# COAST GUARD HEALTH RECORDS

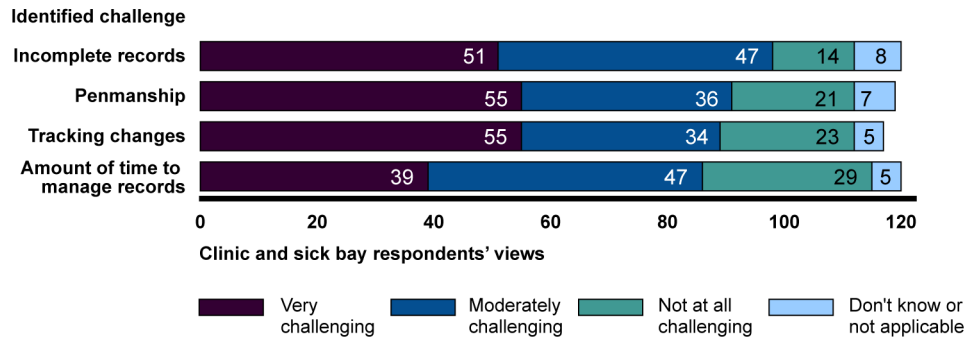
## Timely Acquisition of New System Is Critical to Overcoming Challenges with Paper Process

### What GAO Found

Financial, technical, schedule, and personnel risks led to the United States Coast Guard's (Coast Guard) decision to terminate the Integrated Health Information System (IHIS) project in 2015. According to the Coast Guard (a military service within the Department of Homeland Security), as of August 2017, \$59.9 million was spent on the project over nearly 7 years and no equipment or software could be reused for future efforts. In addition, the Coast Guard could not fully demonstrate the project management actions taken for IHIS, lacked governance mechanisms, and did not document lessons learned for the failed project.

In the absence of an electronic health record (EHR) system, the Coast Guard currently relies on a predominately paper health record management process to document health care services. Currently, the Coast Guard's clinical staff perform various manual steps to process each paper health record. Coast Guard Regional Managers and clinic and sick bay administrators informed GAO of the many challenges encountered in returning to a paper process. These challenges include the inability for some clinics to adequately track vital information such as medications—potentially causing harm to members if they take medications that have dangerous interactions.

**Top Four Challenges Reported by Coast Guard Clinic and Sick Bay Administrators in Managing Paper Health Records**



Source: GAO survey data. | GAO-18-363T

To help alleviate several of these challenges, the Coast Guard has developed alternative work-around processes. However, these alternative processes may not provide sustained solutions to overcoming these challenges.

In February 2016, the Coast Guard initiated the process for acquiring a new EHR system. As of November 2017, agency officials had conducted research and recommended a solution based on performance, risk, cost, and schedule advantages. However, 2 years after canceling IHIS and moving toward a predominately manual process, the agency has not yet made a final determination on this. Successfully and quickly implementing an EHR system is vital to overcoming the challenges the Coast Guard currently faces in managing paper health records. The expeditious implementation of such a system can significantly improve the quality and efficiency of care to the thousands of Coast Guard active duty and reserve members that receive health care.