

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-22-104611](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

Broadband is critical for daily life. It provides a digital lifeline to education, work, and healthcare. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the urgent need for broadband access for all Americans. The President set a goal for universal broadband access by 2030.

GAO was asked to review federal broadband efforts. This report examines: (1) fragmentation and overlap among federal broadband programs and potential limitations to improved alignment and (2) the extent to which interagency coordination efforts are guided by a strategy, among other objectives.

GAO inventoried and analyzed broadband programs and interviewed 50 stakeholders, including broadband providers and local officials. GAO compared interagency coordination efforts to characteristics of a national strategy and reviewed relevant statutes, regulations, and agency documents. GAO also interviewed federal officials from agencies with broadband programs about their programs and coordination efforts.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making three recommendations, including (1) that NTIA identify key statutory limitations to program alignment and develop legislative proposals as appropriate, and (2) that the Executive Office of the President develop and implement a national broadband strategy. NTIA agreed with our recommendations. The Executive Office of the President did not take a position on our recommendation.

View [GAO-22-104611](#). For more information, contact Andrew Von Ah at (202) 512-2834 or [vonaha@gao.gov](mailto:vonaha@gao.gov).

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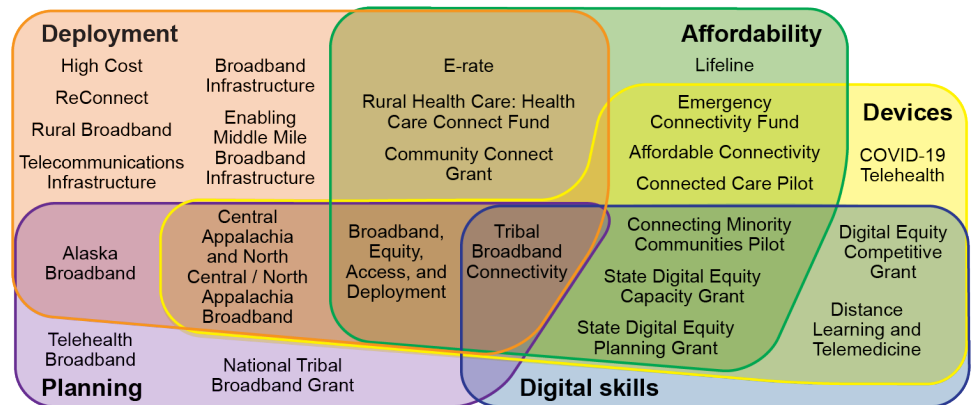
# BROADBAND

## National Strategy Needed to Guide Federal Efforts to Reduce Digital Divide

### What GAO Found

Federal broadband efforts are fragmented and overlapping, with more than 100 programs administered by 15 agencies. Many programs have broadband as their main purpose, and several overlap because they can be used for the purpose of broadband deployment, as shown in the figure. Programs can also help with planning infrastructure, making service affordable, providing devices, and building digital skills. Despite numerous programs and federal investment \$44 billion from 2015 through 2020, millions of Americans still lack broadband, and communities with limited resources may be most affected by fragmentation.

**The Mosaic of 25 Federal Programs with Broadband as a Main Purpose, as of November 2021, by Purpose Category**



Source: GAO analysis. | GAO-22-104611

Agency officials said programmatic differences, including some set by statute, limit their ability to align programs. For example, programs may have differing definitions of eligible areas, populations, and broadband speeds. In 2018, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) led an interagency group that reviewed differing program definitions. However, NTIA did not identify which statutory provisions limit alignment nor recommend any changes. NTIA is responsible for coordinating telecommunications matters across the executive branch and at the end of 2020 gained additional responsibilities for improving broadband coordination. Improved alignment is needed to help address fragmentation and overlap. Without legislative proposals for Congress to consider, agencies may continue to face limitations in aligning programs to close the digital divide.

The U.S. broadband efforts are not guided by a national strategy with clear roles, goals, objectives, and performance measures. In 2021, the Executive Office of the President, through the National Economic Council and in collaboration with other White House offices, took the lead for coordinating broadband programs. The Executive Office of the President has not decided if a national strategy is needed, but it is well positioned to develop and implement one. A strategy to help better align programs could also include legislative proposals for Congress. Without such a strategy, federal broadband efforts will not be fully coordinated, and thereby continue to risk overlap and duplication of effort.