A testimony before the Subcommittee on Technology Modernization, Committee on Veterans' Affairs, House of Representatives

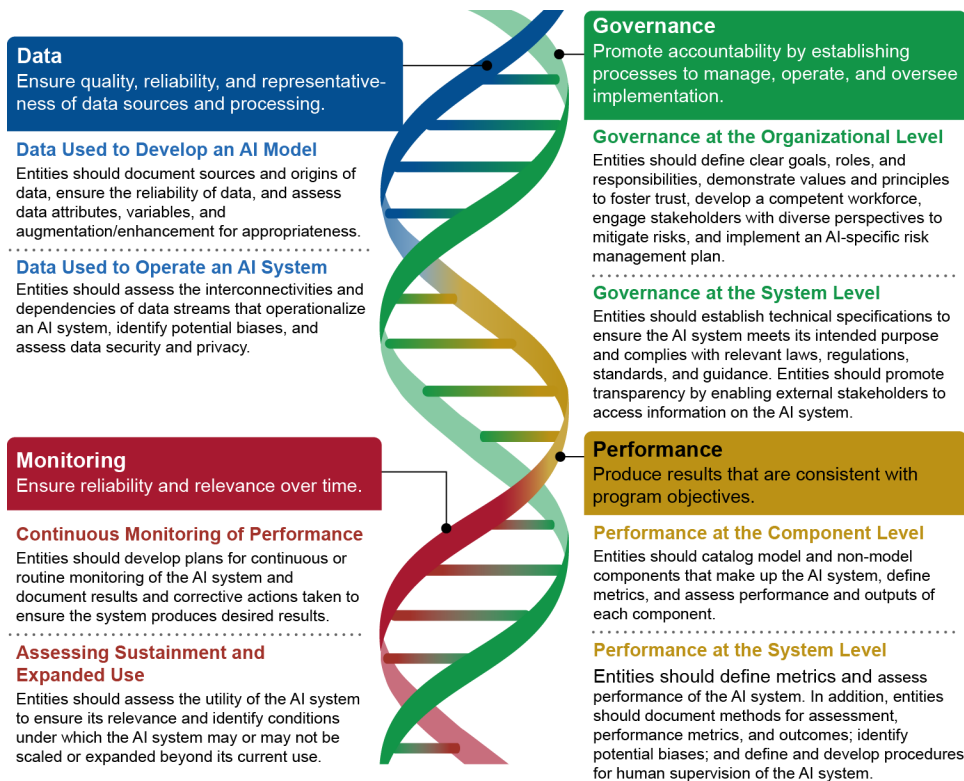For more information, contact: Carol Harris at harriscc@gao.gov.

## What GAO Found

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) systems create outputs using algorithms, which are often trained on text and images obtained from the internet. Technological advancements in the underlying systems and architecture, combined with the open availability of AI tools to the public, have led to widespread use.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) increased its number of AI use cases between 2023 and 2024. VA has also identified challenges in using AI—such as difficulty complying with federal policies and guidance, having sufficient technical resources and budget, acquiring generative AI tools, hiring and developing an AI workforce, and securing sensitive data.

GAO has identified a framework of key practices to help ensure accountability and responsible AI use by federal agencies—including VA—in the design, development, deployment, and continuous monitoring of AI systems. VA and other agencies can use this framework as they consider, select, and implement AI systems (see figure).

**Figure: GAO's Artificial Intelligence (AI) Accountability Framework**



**Data**
Ensure quality, reliability, and representativeness of data sources and processing.

**Data Used to Develop an AI Model**
Entities should document sources and origins of data, ensure the reliability of data, and assess data attributes, variables, and augmentation/enhancement for appropriateness.

**Data Used to Operate an AI System**
Entities should assess the interconnectivities and dependencies of data streams that operationalize an AI system, identify potential biases, and assess data security and privacy.

**Monitoring**
Ensure reliability and relevance over time.

**Continuous Monitoring of Performance**
Entities should develop plans for continuous or routine monitoring of the AI system and document results and corrective actions taken to ensure the system produces desired results.

**Assessing Sustainment and Expanded Use**
Entities should assess the utility of the AI system to ensure its relevance and identify conditions under which the AI system may or may not be scaled or expanded beyond its current use.

**Governance**
Promote accountability by establishing processes to manage, operate, and oversee implementation.

**Governance at the Organizational Level**
Entities should define clear goals, roles, and responsibilities, demonstrate values and principles to foster trust, develop a competent workforce, engage stakeholders with diverse perspectives to mitigate risks, and implement an AI-specific risk management plan.

**Governance at the System Level**
Entities should establish technical specifications to ensure the AI system meets its intended purpose and complies with relevant laws, regulations, standards, and guidance. Entities should promote transparency by enabling external stakeholders to access information on the AI system.

**Performance**
Produce results that are consistent with program objectives.

**Performance at the Component Level**
Entities should catalog model and non-model components that make up the AI system, define metrics, and assess performance and outputs of each component.

**Performance at the System Level**
Entities should define metrics and assess performance of the AI system. In addition, entities should document methods for assessment, performance metrics, and outcomes; identify potential biases; and define and develop procedures for human supervision of the AI system.

Source: GAO (analysis and illustration). | GAO-25-108739

VA's use of the AI accountability framework along with a solid foundation of IT management and AI use cases could enable the department to better position itself to support ongoing and future work involving the technology.

## Why GAO Did This Study

Developments in generative AI—which can create text, images, audio, video, and other content when prompted by a user—have revolutionized how the technology can be used in many industries, including healthcare, and at federal agencies including VA.

AI is a transformative technology for government operations, but it also poses unique challenges because the source of information used by AI systems may not always be clear or accurate. These challenges may be difficult for federal agencies including VA to overcome.

In prior reports, GAO found that VA has experienced longstanding challenges in managing its IT projects and programs. This raises questions about the efficiency and effectiveness of its operations and its ability to deliver intended outcomes needed to help advance the department's mission.

GAO's statement describes (1) VA's AI use and challenges, and (2) principles and key practices for federal agencies that are considering implementing AI.

GAO summarized a prior report that described VA's use of AI. GAO also summarized key practices for federal agencies and other entities that are considering implementing AI systems.

## What GAO Recommends

The prior GAO reports described in this statement include 26 recommendations to VA concerning management of its IT resources that have not yet been implemented, and one recommendation to update its AI inventory that has not been implemented.