

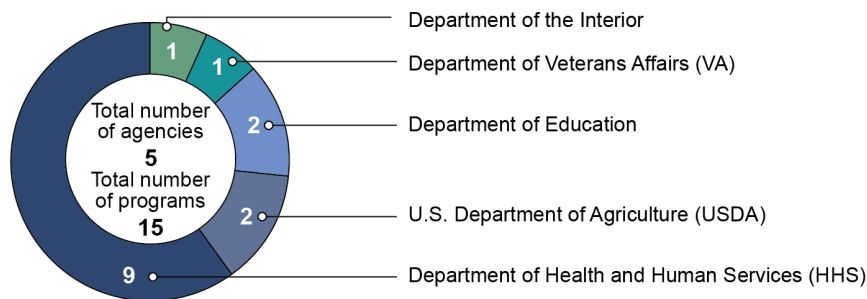
A report to congressional requesters.

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**What GAO Found**

GAO found that 242 federal programs, inclusive of 12 tax expenditures, provide a range of benefits and services to pregnant women, children through age 5, or their families, among other groups. Of the 242 programs, 15 provide some amount of direct services solely to this population.

**Fiscal Year 2024 Federal Programs That Provide Some Amount of Direct Services Solely to Pregnant Women, Children Through Age 5, or Their Families, by Agency**



Source: GAO analysis of agency responses to GAO’s data collection instrument. | GAO-26-107572

The 15 programs are fragmented across five federal agencies, meaning the programs overlap across the agencies to some extent—with similar populations or services. However, the programs are not duplicative because they vary in beneficiary population characteristics or type of services provided. Officials from all 15 programs reported coordinating with other programs serving pregnant women, children through age 5, or their families. Coordination improves agencies’ ability to provide services and improves outcomes for beneficiaries.

Three of the 15 programs have not fully established a performance management process at the federal level—in which they set performance goals, collect performance information, and use that information to assess results:

- HHS’s Preschool Development Grants Birth Through Five Program. HHS officials said this program does not set federal performance goals because it monitors progress toward state-defined goals in order to maximize state flexibility. However, a federal performance management process allows a program to assess national progress across varied state activities.
- USDA’s Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Farmers Market Nutrition Program. USDA officials said such a process is not warranted, in part, because the program is small and lacks dedicated funding for this. However, regardless of program size, Congress and taxpayers need to know how effectively tax dollars are being spent.
- VA’s Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Maternity Care Coordinator Program. Officials said they are working on establishing a process, but have not yet completed it.

By fully establishing such a process, the agencies would have a more systematic way to identify potential strategies to reduce any unnecessary fragmentation and overlap, ensure that the programs are achieving their intended results, and target resources appropriately.

**Why GAO Did This Study**

Federal programs play a significant role in supporting many pregnant women, children through age 5, and their families by providing services to address their distinct needs.

GAO was asked to identify programs that serve pregnant women, children through age 5, or their families. This report examines (1) federal programs that serve this population, including programs that provide some amount of direct services solely to this population; (2) the extent to which duplication, overlap, or fragmentation exists among programs that provide some amount of direct services solely to this population; and (3) the extent to which programs that provide some amount of direct services solely to this population have established a performance management process.

GAO identified 250 potentially relevant programs primarily using the federal assistance listings on the System for Award Management website, SAM.gov. To verify the list of programs and collect additional information about them, GAO sent a data collection instrument to the 18 federal agencies that administer the programs. GAO also reviewed relevant agency documentation and interviewed agency officials, as appropriate.

**What GAO Recommends**

GAO is making three recommendations. Two recommend that HHS and USDA establish a federal performance management process for one of their programs. One recommends that VA finalize its federal performance management process for one of its programs. HHS disagreed with GAO’s recommendation. USDA neither agreed nor disagreed. VA agreed. GAO maintains its recommendations, as discussed in this report.