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SOCIAL SAFETY NET

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE PLAN 2000-2002





GAO'S MISSION

GAO exists to support the Congress in meeting its Constitutional responsibilities and to help improve the performance and accountability of the federal government for the benefit of the American people.

CORE VALUES

ACCOUNTABILITY

describes the nature of GAO's work. GAO helps the Congress oversee federal programs and operations to ensure accountability to the American people. GAO's evaluators, auditors, lawyers, economists, public policy analysts, information technology specialists, and other multidisciplinary professionals seek to enhance the economy, efficiency, effectiveness, and credibility of the federal government both in fact and in the eyes of the American people. GAO accomplishes its mission through a variety of activities, including financial audits, program reviews, investigations, legal support, and program analyses.

INTEGRITY

describes the high standards that GAO sets for itself in the conduct of its work. GAO takes a professional, objective, fact-based, nonpartisan, nonideological, fair, and balanced approach to all of its activities. Integrity is the foundation of reputation, and GAO's approach to its work ensures both.

RELIABILITY

describes GAO's goal for how its work is viewed by the Congress and the American public. GAO produces high-quality reports, testimony, briefings, legal opinions, and other products and services that are timely, accurate, useful, clear, and candid.

FOREWORD

In fulfilling its mission, GAO examines the use of public funds; evaluates federal programs and activities; and provides analyses, options, recommendations, and other assistance to help the Congress make effective oversight, policy, and funding decisions. In this context, GAO works to continuously improve the economy, efficiency, and effectiveness of the federal government through the conduct of financial audits, program reviews and evaluations, analyses, legal opinions, investigations, and other services. Most of this work is based upon original data collection and analysis.

To ensure that GAO, in serving the Congress, targets the right issues, provides balanced perspectives, and develops practical recommendations, GAO regularly consults with the Congress and maintains relationships with a variety of federal, state, academic, and professional organizations. GAO also obtains the perspectives of applicable trade groups and associations and attends professional conferences. Moreover, GAO regularly coordinates its work with CRS, CBO, and agency Inspector General offices. Throughout, GAO's core values of accountability, integrity, and reliability are guiding principles.

In keeping with its mission and responsibilities, GAO has developed a strategic plan that includes four strategic goals and 21 related strategic objectives. To ensure that GAO's resources are directed to achieving its goals, a separate strategic plan underlies each objective. In support of GAO's goal of providing timely, quality service to the Congress and the federal government to address current and emerging challenges to the well-being and financial security of the American people, this strategic plan describes the performance goals GAO will use in supporting congressional and federal decisionmaking on the social safety net for Americans in need.

This plan covers a 3-year period; however, because unanticipated events may significantly affect even the best of plans, GAO's planning process allows for updating this plan to respond quickly to emerging issues. If you have questions or desire information on additional or completed work related to this strategic objective, please call or e-mail us or the contact persons listed on the following pages.

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SERVING THE CONGRESS

GAO'S STRATEGIC PLAN FRAMEWORK



MISSION

GAO exists to support the Congress in meeting its Constitutional responsibilities and to help improve the performance and accountability of the federal government for the benefit of the American people.

GOALS

PROVIDE TIMELY, QUALITY SERVICE TO THE CONGRESS AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT



TO ADDRESS CURRENT AND EMERGING CHALLENGES TO THE WELL-BEING AND FINANCIAL SECURITY OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

SUPPORT THE TRANSITION



TO RESPOND TO CHANGING SECURITY THREATS AND THE CHALLENGES OF GLOBAL INTERDEPENDENCE

MAXIMIZE THE VALUE OF GAO



BY BEING A MODEL ORGANIZATION FOR THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT



TO A MORE RESULTS-ORIENTED AND ACCOUNTABLE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

THEMES

Demographics Globalization Quality of Life Security Technology
Government Performance and Accountability

OBJECTIVES

Health care needs and financing
 Retirement income security
SOCIAL SAFETY NET
 Education/workforce issues
 Effective system of justice
 Community investment
 Natural resources use and environmental protection
 Physical infrastructure

Diffuse security threats
 Military capabilities and readiness
 Advancement of U.S. interests
 Global market forces

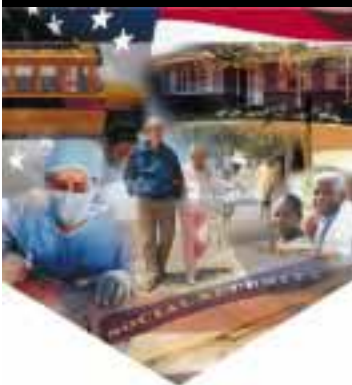
Fiscal position of the government
 Government financing and accountability
 Governmentwide management reforms
 Economy, efficiency, and effectiveness improvements in federal agencies

Client relations
 Strategic and annual planning
 Human capital
 Core business and supporting processes
 Information technology services

CORE VALUES

Accountability Integrity Reliability

PROVIDE TIMELY,
QUALITY SERVICE TO THE
CONGRESS AND THE
FEDERAL GOVERNMENT



TO ADDRESS
CURRENT AND EMERGING
CHALLENGES TO THE
WELL-BEING AND
FINANCIAL SECURITY
OF THE
AMERICAN PEOPLE

Health care needs and
financing
Retirement income security
SOCIAL SAFETY NET
Education/workforce issues
Effective system of justice
Community investment
Natural resources use and
environmental protection
Physical infrastructure

THE SOCIAL SAFETY NET FOR AMERICANS IN NEED

American culture values the traits of independence and self-sufficiency. However, the country has established a social compact to provide a safety net for its citizens facing special needs. In fiscal year 1998, the federal government spent about \$325 billion on these safety net programs, including programs designed to provide income support, health services, housing assistance, and food assistance to more than 30 million low-income Americans, including children, the elderly, the homeless, and the disabled.

Providing accountability for and oversight of these programs presents a formidable challenge. The programs are administered by numerous federal agencies, as well as by state and local governments; involve many types of assistance (such as cash support, training, and services); have different eligibility rules; and vary among jurisdictions because of the key roles played by state and local governments. Information on both the ultimate effectiveness of these programs and the efficiency of their delivery is limited.

GAO's strategic plan identifies five multiyear performance goals to support congressional and federal decisionmaking on the social safety net for Americans in need. The following pages discuss the significance of the performance goals, the key efforts that will be undertaken, and the potential outcomes.

Performance Goals

- Analyze the Results of Welfare Reform
- Evaluate Federal and State Program Strategies for Financing and Overseeing Chronic and Long-Term Health Care
- Assess States' Experiences in Providing Health Insurance Coverage for Previously Uninsured Low-Income Children
- Identify Opportunities to Provide More Cost-Effective Food Assistance Programs and Housing Assistance Programs
- Identify Ways to Improve Federal Disability Programs



Analyze the Results of Welfare Reform

Significance

The welfare reform legislation of 1996, built upon states' recent reforms, marked a fundamental shift in how the federal government provides aid for needy families with children. It ended the 60-year-old federal entitlement to assistance for eligible families and created the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families block grant, which makes \$16.8 billion available to states each year through 2002. The goals of this landmark legislation included ending welfare dependency by promoting personal responsibility and work. It also devolved much responsibility for welfare policies to state and local decisionmakers. States are now transforming the nation's welfare system into a work-focused, temporary assistance program for needy families. These changes, facilitated by strong economic growth, have been accompanied by an almost 50-percent decline in the number of families on the welfare rolls—from a peak of about 5 million in 1994. Although many adults who left welfare during the initial years of reform were employed at some time after leaving the rolls, often at low-paying jobs, much remains unknown about the long-term impact of welfare reform on families' well-being, including those who have left welfare for low-wage work, and the implications of reform for federal and state budgets.



Key Efforts

Assess federal efforts to oversee and evaluate welfare reform

Monitor the status of families affected by welfare reform

Assess state efforts to transition welfare recipients into employment and to support low-income adults' work efforts, such as extending unemployment insurance for part-time, intermittent, and low-wage workers

Analyze the fiscal impact of TANF block grants on state and federal spending for low-income families

Determine the extent to which state and local automated systems meet key information needs for moving families from welfare to work and identify obstacles to improving systems

Assess state and local efforts to ensure the safety of children whose parents are unable to fulfill their parental responsibilities

Potential Outcomes

Improved federal oversight and evaluation of welfare reform outcomes

Better congressional understanding of how families are being affected by welfare reform

More effective federal and state strategies for supporting the work efforts of low-income families and reducing their need for welfare

More complete information on welfare reform's impact on state and federal budgets for use in congressional deliberations on TANF reauthorization in 2002

More efficient and effective use of automated information systems in helping low-income families support themselves through work

Improvements in finding permanent and safe homes for children who have experienced parental child abuse and neglect

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Evaluate Federal and State Program Strategies for Financing and Overseeing Chronic and Long-Term Health Care

Significance

The aging of the baby-boomers, combined with medical advances that are contributing to longer life expectancies, will lead to a tremendous increase in the elderly population over the next three decades. In particular, there will be an even larger increase in the number of individuals aged 85 or older, many of whom will require long-term care services that they will be unable to fully pay for. Financing these services—within the context of evolving service needs and alternatives—will be a challenge for the baby-boomers, their families, and federal and state governments. After private expenditures, Medicaid is the second-largest payer for long-term care, covering at least some of the costs for two-thirds of nursing home residents. Many individuals become impoverished, and thus eligible for Medicaid, by “spending down” their assets. Taken together, Medicaid, Medicare, and other public programs contribute three-fifths of the \$91 billion spent annually on long-term care, with the remainder paid by the elderly, the disabled, or their families. The long-term care expenditures of the elderly are disproportionately used to purchase nursing home care. Over the past decade, there has been growing emphasis on delivering services in the community rather than nursing homes—not only to the younger disabled but also to elderly individuals.



Key Efforts

Analyze the barriers that have prevented states from establishing integrated programs for elderly or disabled beneficiaries dually eligible for Medicare and Medicaid

Review quality standards and their execution for community-based long-term care

Examine nursing homes' compliance with federal and state quality standards

Potential Outcomes

Elimination of barriers that have prevented states from experimenting with managed care delivery systems that integrate acute and long-term care for this expensive population

Enhanced accountability for the quality of community-based long-term care

Improve quality of care in nursing homes



Assess States' Experiences in Providing Health Insurance Coverage for Previously Uninsured Low-Income Children

Significance

Despite strong economic growth during the 1990s, the number of uninsured has continued to climb from about 35 million to 43 million. Many of the uninsured are poor children with working parents who are themselves uninsured. Two public programs address the needs of uninsured low-income children—Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program. While the Medicaid statute sets minimum income standards for eligibility, states may offer coverage to children at higher incomes if they choose to do so. SCHIP was created in 1997 to provide health insurance to the uninsured children whose income was too high to qualify for Medicaid. Implementation of SCHIP has also stressed enrolling the large number of uninsured children who are eligible for Medicaid but not enrolled. SCHIP permits states to insure the parents of SCHIP-eligible children if it is cost-effective to do so. Some research has suggested that offering coverage to parents is the best way to ensure the enrollment of children. Overseeing and maintaining accountability for these two public programs can be challenging due to state variation in eligibility rules, benefits, and delivery systems. Changes due to federal welfare reform and new state flexibility in transitioning to managed care delivery systems have complicated the receipt, reporting, and monitoring of the services provided. Moreover, because SCHIP-programs can have different providers, fees, and benefits than Medicaid, families that experience fluctuations in their income levels may move back and forth between the two programs, causing confusion and adversely affecting continuity of care.



Key Efforts

Review Medicaid and SCHIP enrollment efforts to ensure access to and receipt of services

Evaluate federal safeguards for mandatory Medicaid managed care programs that enroll children with special needs

Assess states' efforts to coordinate Medicaid and SCHIP eligibility, benefits, and providers

Determine the extent to which children receive Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment under Medicaid

Potential Outcomes

Greater access to services for beneficiaries with special needs

Improved federal safeguards to better ensure the enrollment of special needs children in Medicaid managed care programs

Improved SCHIP coverage from disseminating successful practices established by states to coordinate Medicaid and SCHIP

Improved delivery of Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment and other relevant services to children

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Identify Opportunities to Provide More Cost-Effective Food Assistance Programs and Housing Assistance Programs

Significance

Food assistance programs represent a significant component of the social safety net for Americans. In fiscal year 1999, the Department of Agriculture spent about \$34 billion to help feed needy families and children. According to recent estimates, 45 million Americans receive some form of federal food assistance. For example, 19 million people currently receive food stamps, and almost half of the babies born in this country receive Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children benefits. However, the Welfare Reform Act of 1996 changed the eligibility and benefit requirements for some of these programs, necessitating an analysis of the changes' effects on the programs and their beneficiaries, including the extent to which these programs reach eligible populations. In addition, long-standing problems with service delivery and fraud suggest the need to strengthen these programs' management and improve their service delivery. Concerning housing programs, despite billions of dollars in annual expenditures and a booming economy, the supply of low-rent housing has declined dramatically (by 1.3 million units since 1996), while the number of people needing assistance continues to increase. Currently, 12.5 million people who receive no housing assistance live in severely substandard housing and/or pay over half of their income for rent. Furthermore, existing housing assistance and supportive services programs are faced with meeting the growing and changing needs of special populations—the elderly, the homeless, and persons with disabilities. These trends will place additional emphasis on the need to increase the cost-effectiveness of housing programs, to strengthen program delivery mechanisms, to modify programs in light of changing needs, and to ensure that responsibilities for administering the programs are being carried out in the most efficient and effective manner.



Key Efforts

Review how welfare reform has affected the Food Stamp Program

Assess the effectiveness of the services provided by the WIC program

Review the adequacy of federal and state management and internal controls for food assistance programs

Review the costs and benefits of major federally assisted housing programs and the quality of housing provided under those programs

Assess how current housing programs can better meet the growing demand for low-income housing

Identify the issues involved in consolidating the multifamily housing programs of HUD and USDA's Rural Housing Service

Assess whether federal housing programs, policies, and services support the growing and changing needs of special populations

Potential Outcomes

Informed basis for the Congress to assess the impact of welfare reform on the availability of food stamps to eligible populations

Options for delivering the WIC program's benefits and services more effectively and efficiently

Reduced fraud, waste, and abuse in USDA's food assistance programs

Options to better allocate limited funding among housing assistance programs

More cost-effective housing assistance programs and improvements to the physical condition of assisted housing

Options for consolidating and improving the effectiveness of federal multifamily housing programs

Options to address unmet housing needs and to minimize or eliminate barriers to services for special needs populations

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Identify Ways to Improve Federal Disability Programs

Significance

For people who are unable to work because of certain severe medical or mental impairments, the Social Security Administration's Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income programs, along with the Department of Veterans Affairs' programs for disabled veterans, provide the final line of protection against income loss. In recent years, there has been a sharp growth in disability programs. Fiscal year 1998 outlays in SSA's disability programs totaled about \$72 billion, while outlays in VA's disability programs came to about \$20 billion. GAO's work on these SSA and VA programs has brought to light several matters warranting attention. The Disability Insurance fund faces possible insolvency by 2020, and the SSI program is a "high-risk" program because of the large sums involved—about \$24 billion in 1998—and there is evidence of insufficient mechanisms to prevent unwarranted payments. In all of the programs, there are concerns about the quality of the disability determinations and the efficiency of the determination processes. At the same time, advances in medical technologies and changes in work opportunities have increased the possibilities of some disability beneficiaries moving off the rolls and into productive employment.



Key Efforts

Identify options for improving the solvency of the DI program

Analyze ways to minimize fraud, waste, and overpayments in the disability programs

Study approaches and best practices for moving disabled persons who can work into the workforce

Assess SSA's efforts to improve the disability adjudication and Continuing Disability Review processes

Study the potential impact of Social Security reform proposals on people with disabilities

Evaluate proposals to restructure how veterans are compensated for disabilities

Assess VA's efforts to streamline its process for making disability determinations

Examine VA's disability program organizational structure

Potential Outcomes

Better congressional understanding of alternatives for maintaining Disability Trust trust fund solvency while minimizing any adverse effects on the budget

Administrative actions to improve the accuracy of disability determinations and the timeliness and accuracy of subsequent reviews of those determinations

Legislative and administrative initiatives, based upon identified best practices, aimed at transitioning beneficiaries who can work into the workforce

More consistent decisions on SSA disability determination appeals and a reduced backlog of Continuing Disability Reviews

More informed congressional Social Security reform deliberations on how the proposals would affect disabled persons

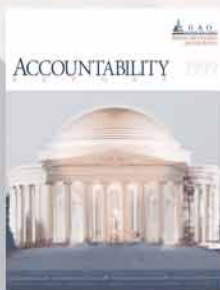
Better congressional understanding of alternatives for improving the structure of disability benefits for veterans

A quicker and more consistent VA process for acting upon veterans' disability claims

VA organizational changes to improve the delivery of disability benefits to veterans

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The full set of GAO's strategic planning, performance, and accountability documents are listed below. All of these documents, as well as other GAO reports and documents, may be obtained electronically on our website, www.gao.gov.



Accountability Report for fiscal year 1999

Strategic Plan, 2000-2005

Strategic Plan Executive Summary

Strategic Plan Framework

Strategic Objective Plans

Health Care Needs and Financing

Retirement Income Security

Social Safety Net

Education/Workforce Issues

Effective System of Justice

Community Investment

Natural Resources Use and Environmental Protection

Physical Infrastructure

Diffuse Security Threats

Military Capabilities and Readiness

Advancement of U.S. Interests

Global Market Forces

Fiscal Position of the Government

Government Financing and Accountability

Governmentwide Management Reforms

Economy, Efficiency, and Effectiveness

Improvements in Federal Agencies

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Performance Plan Fiscal Year 2001



SOCIAL SAFETY NET
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