

Why GAO Did This Study

Many federal programs—within the Departments of Education, Labor, and Veterans Affairs; the Social Security Administration; and other agencies—help people with disabilities overcome barriers to employment. Section 21 of Pub. L. No. 111-139 requires GAO to identify and report annually on programs, agencies, offices, and initiatives that have duplicative goals or activities. GAO examined the extent to which programs that support employment for people with disabilities (1) provide similar services to similar populations and (2) measure effectiveness. GAO identified programs by searching the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance and consulting agency officials. GAO surveyed and interviewed agency officials to determine program objectives and activities. Nine agencies reviewed the draft report and five provided comments. Labor was concerned that GAO characterized its programs as fragmented and potentially duplicative. While multiple programs may be appropriate, GAO maintains that additional review and coordination may reduce inefficiencies and improve effectiveness among overlapping programs.

GAO is not recommending executive action at this time. In a recent report, GAO suggested the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) consider establishing governmentwide goals for employment of people with disabilities, and working with agencies that administer overlapping programs to determine whether consolidation might result in more effective and efficient delivery of services. GAO continues to believe these actions are needed and will follow up with OMB to determine their status.

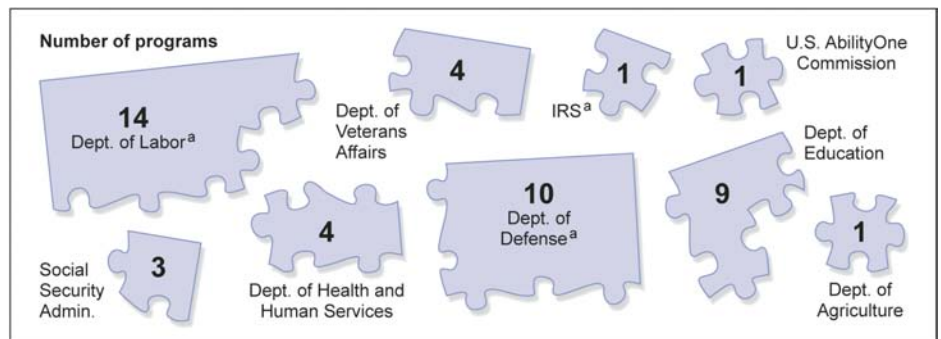
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EMPLOYMENT FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Little Is Known about the Effectiveness of Fragmented and Overlapping Programs

What GAO Found

GAO identified 45 programs that supported employment for people with disabilities in fiscal year 2010, reflecting a fragmented system of services. The programs were administered by nine federal agencies and overseen by even more congressional committees. All programs overlapped with at least one other program in that they provided one or more similar employment service to a similar population—people with disabilities. The greatest overlap occurred in programs serving veterans and servicemembers (19 programs) and youth and young adults (5 programs). In addition, GAO identified seven programs that did not limit eligibility to any particular population and were potentially available to veterans and servicemembers or youth. Some overlapping programs, such as those with specific eligibility requirements, have less potential for duplication—providing the same services to the same beneficiaries—than others. However, even when the potential for duplication of services is low, there may be inefficiencies associated with operating multiple programs that provide similar services to similar populations. Coordination across programs may help address fragmentation and potential duplication, but officials that GAO surveyed reported only limited coordination. However, among six selected programs that only serve people with disabilities—including the Department of Education’s Vocational Rehabilitation program and the Social Security Administration’s Ticket to Work program—officials cited more consistent coordination.



Source: GAO analysis.

^aThe Department of Labor jointly administers the Workforce Recruitment Program with the Department of Defense and the Work Opportunity Tax Credit with the Internal Revenue Service. These programs are therefore included under both the Department of Labor and the other administering agencies in the figure.

Most (32) of the 45 programs surveyed tracked at least one employment-related outcome measure for people with disabilities, but overall little is known about the effectiveness of these programs. The most commonly tracked outcomes for people with disabilities were “entered employment” (28 programs) and “employment retention” (18 programs). However, it may be difficult to compare outcomes across programs, in part, because of variation in the type and severity of participants’ disabilities. In addition, only 10 of the 45 programs reported that an evaluation had been conducted in the last 5 years. Just one of the 45 programs (Job Corps) reported conducting an impact study—a study that would most clearly show whether the program (and not other factors) was responsible for improved employment outcomes for people with disabilities. However, additional studies are underway for at least two other programs.