

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-18-696T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Technology Modernization, Committee on Veterans' Affairs, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008* included provisions that VA and DOD jointly develop and implement electronic health record systems or capabilities and accelerate the exchange of health care information. The act also required that these systems be compliant with applicable interoperability standards. Further, the act established a joint Interagency Program Office to act as a single point of accountability for the efforts, with the function of implementing, by September 30, 2009, electronic health record systems that allow for full interoperability.

This testimony discusses GAO's previously reported findings on the establishment and evolution of the Interagency Program Office over the last decade. In developing this testimony, GAO summarized findings from its reports issued in 2008 through 2018, and information on the departments' actions in response to GAO's recommendations.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that VA clearly define the role and responsibilities of the Interagency Program Office in the governance plans for acquisition of the department's new electronic health record system.

View [GAO-18-696T](#). For more information, contact Carol C. Harris at (202) 512-4456 or harrisc@gao.gov.

September 13, 2018

ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORDS

Clear Definition of the Interagency Program Office's Role in VA's New Modernization Effort Would Strengthen Accountability

What GAO Found

Since its establishment in 2008, the Department of Defense (DOD) and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Interagency Program Office has been involved in various approaches to increase health information interoperability. However, the office has not been effectively positioned to function as the single point of accountability for the departments' electronic health record system interoperability efforts. For example,

- Between July 2008 and January 2010, GAO issued reports on VA's and DOD's efforts to set up the office, which highlighted steps the departments had taken, but also identified deficiencies, such as vacant leadership positions and a lack of necessary plans. GAO recommended that the departments improve management of their interoperability efforts by developing a project plan and results-oriented performance goals and measures.
- In April 2009, the Interagency Program Office was assigned responsibility for establishing a lifetime electronic record for servicemembers and veterans, called the Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record. GAO reported in February 2011 that, among other things, the office had not developed and approved an integrated master schedule, a master program plan, or performance metrics for the initiative, as outlined in the office's charter. Accordingly, GAO recommended that the departments correct these deficiencies to strengthen their efforts to establish the Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record.
- In March 2011, VA and DOD committed to jointly developing a new, common integrated electronic health record system and empowered the Interagency Program Office with increased authority, expanded responsibilities, and increased staffing levels for leading the integrated system effort. However, in February 2013, the departments abandoned their plan to develop the integrated system and stated that they would again pursue separate modernization efforts. In February 2014, GAO reported on this decision and recommended that VA and DOD take steps to better position the office to function as the single point of accountability for achieving interoperability between the departments' electronic health record systems.

VA and DOD stated that they agreed with the above GAO recommendations. However, in several cases the departments' subsequent actions were incomplete and did not fully address all recommendations.

In June 2017 VA announced that it planned to acquire the same electronic health record system that DOD has been acquiring. GAO testified in June 2018 that a governance structure had been proposed that would be expected to leverage existing joint governance facilitated by the Interagency Program Office. At that time, VA's program officials had stated that the department's governance plans for the new program were expected to be finalized in October 2018. However, the officials have not yet indicated what role, if any, the Interagency Program Office is to have in the governance process. Ensuring that the role and responsibilities of the office are clearly defined within these governance plans is essential to VA successfully acquiring and implementing the same system as DOD.