

GAO Updates High Risk Programs List

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Yesterday, GAO released its biennial update of federal high risk programs, a total of 32 programs including two new areas, Veterans Health Care and IT Acquisitions and Operations.

Since the list's inception in 1990 with an initial slate of 14 program areas, 43 programs have been added and 23 removed. GAO removes programs from the list when the following criteria are met: leadership commitment, agency capacity, an action plan, monitoring efforts, and demonstrated progress.

This year **GAO states** that progress is being made, but no programs were removed. Eighteen of the 30 programs on the list in 2013 partially met criteria for removal and 11 met at least one of the criteria for removal. GAO is reducing the scope of two high risk areas, Protecting Public Health through Enhanced Oversight of Medical Products and DoD Contract Management, due improvements made. GAO is expanding its oversight of two other programs due to growing risk potential: Enforcement of Tax Laws and Ensuring the Security of Federal Information Systems and Cyber Critical Infrastructure and Protecting the Privacy of Personally Identifiable Information (PII).

GAO is adding the program entitled Managing Risks and Improving Veterans Affairs Health Care due to VA's lack of action on many of GAO's past recommendations to improve veteran health care access and delivery. Although VA has taken some action, work still remains in the areas of policies and processes, oversight and accountability, IT, training, and resources.

GAO is also adding the program entitled Improving the Management of Information Technology Acquisitions and Operations. Despite legislation and administrative efforts to improve IT acquisitions and management, investments are still experiencing cost overruns, schedule lapses, and failure in some cases. According to GAO's report, "Over the past 5 years, GAO made more than 730 recommendations; however, only about 23% had been fully implemented as of January 2015."

Efforts to improve IT acquisition and management will directly affect federal contractors, adding to increased scrutiny of contractor performance and potentially increasing required project performance documentation. Additionally, program areas such as those that are benefits based, may offer opportunities for technology contractors. Federal demand for IT solutions to combat waste, fraud and abuse will continue to increase over the next several years. Such products and services include technologies for pre-screening and identity authentication; data capture and processing; examination and detection; big data and analytics; and investigation, prosecution and recovery.

Through Congressional oversight and legislation, along with OMB leadership and agency accountability and corrective actions, vast improvements have been made to areas remaining on the high risk list. Continued diligence by agencies in implementing GAO recommendations will lead to continued progress and elimination of federal program areas from the list.