



# Opportunities to Reduce Potential Duplication in Government Programs, Save Tax Dollars and Enhance Revenues

*United States Government Accountability Office GAO*

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This is GAO's first annual report to Congress in response to a new statutory requirement that GAO identify federal programs, agencies, offices, and initiatives, either within departments or governmentwide, which have duplicative goals or activities. Congress asked GAO to conduct this work and to report annually on our findings.<sup>1</sup> This work will inform government policymakers as they address the rapidly building fiscal pressures facing our national government. GAO's most recent update of its annual simulations of the federal government's fiscal outlook underscores the need to address the long-term sustainability of the federal government's fiscal policies.<sup>2</sup> Since the end of the recent recession, the gross domestic product has grown slowly and unemployment has remained at a high level. While the economy is still recovering and in need of careful attention, there is widespread agreement on the need to look not only at the near term but also at steps that begin to change the long-term fiscal path as soon as possible without slowing the recovery. With the passage of time, the window to address the challenge narrows and the magnitude of the required changes grows. GAO's simulations show continually increasing levels of debt that are unsustainable over time absent changes in current fiscal policies. The objectives of this report are to (1) identify federal programs or functional areas where unnecessary duplication, overlap, or fragmentation exists, the actions needed to address such conditions, and the potential financial and other benefits of doing so; and (2) highlight other opportunities for potential cost savings or enhanced revenues. To meet these objectives, we are including 81 areas for consideration based on related GAO work. This report is divided into two sections. Section I presents 34 areas where agencies, offices, or initiatives have similar or overlapping objectives or provide similar services to the same populations; or where government missions are fragmented across multiple agencies or programs. These areas span a range of government missions: agriculture, defense, economic development, energy, general government, health, homeland security, international affairs, and social services. Within and across these missions, this report touches on hundreds of federal programs, affecting virtually all major federal departments and agencies. Overlap and fragmentation among government programs or activities can be harbingers of unnecessary duplication. Reducing or eliminating duplication, overlap, or fragmentation could potentially save billions of tax dollars annually and help agencies provide more efficient and effective services. The areas identified in this report are not intended to represent the full universe of duplication, overlap, or fragmentation within the federal government. We will continue to identify additional issues in future reports. Given today's fiscal environment, Section II of this report summarizes 47 additional areas—beyond those directly related to duplication, overlap, or fragmentation—describing other opportunities for agencies or Congress to consider taking action that could either reduce the cost of government operations or enhance revenue collections for the Treasury. These cost-savings and revenue opportunities also span a wide range of federal government agencies and mission areas. The issues raised in both sections were drawn from GAO's prior and ongoing work. Many of the issues included in this report are focused on activities that are contained within single departments or agencies. In those cases, agency officials can generally achieve cost savings or other benefits by implementing existing GAO recommendations or by undertaking new actions suggested in this report. However, a number of issues we have identified, particularly in the duplication area, span multiple organizations and therefore may require higher-level attention.

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