

# **Policy Value of Data**

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**A GAO perspective on the value of data  
for informing federal disability policy**

**Dan Bertoni, Director, Disability Issues  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
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## Introduction

- **GAO's mission to serve the Congress**
  - **How GAO does its work**
  - **GAO's reliance on data and related frameworks**
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- **GAO's commitment to data reliability**
    - **Determine validity and reliability of data used as evidence to support a finding**
    - **Assess processes for ensuring data reliability and test data**
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## Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA):

- **GPRA requirements are dependent on data.**
  - **Extensive GAO work related to GPRA.**
  - **GPRA challenges (GAO-04-38)**
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## GAO's High Risk list – Spotlight on disability issues

- **2003: Improving and Modernizing Federal Disability Programs placed on high risk list**
  - **2009: Still on high risk list; underscores lack of coordination among federal disability programs and absence of overarching disability policy**
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## GAO's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Challenges – Spotlight on disability issues

- **GAO vehicle for highlighting significant fiscal imbalances facing the federal government.**
  - **Retirement and Disability one of 12 broad reexamination areas identified by GAO**
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## Key National Indicators

- **2003: GAO partnered with the National Academies to hold a GAO Forum on National Indicators**
  - **2004: GAO identified benefits, challenges, and next steps to pursuing national indicators.**
  - **2007: GAO identified how Congress could support national indicator efforts**
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## **FEDERAL DISABILITY ASSISTANCE: Wide Array of Programs Needs to be Examined in Light of 21st Century Challenges (GAO-05-626)**

- **Identified over 20 federal agencies and almost 200 federal programs**
  - **Total expenditures exceeded \$120 billion in 2003 (mostly monetary support)**
  - **Insufficient data on \$s spent and number of people served by agencies serving both people with and without disabilities**
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## HIGHLIGHTS OF A GAO FORUM: Modernizing Federal Disability Policy (GAO-07-934SP)

- Convened a diverse group to discuss challenges to modernization. Key points concerning data were:
    - There is no federal system for disability that coordinates the many different disability programs and services, and no comprehensive lifetime picture of the needs of individuals with disabilities.
    - Data collection on people with disabilities needs to be improved, & multiple indicators are needed to measure economic success as well as quality of life.
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## **FEDERAL DISABILITY PROGRAMS: More Strategic Coordination Could Help Overcome Challenges to Needed Transformation (GAO-08-635)**

- Reviewed SSA and VA modernization efforts
  - SSA using outdated labor-market data
  - SSA and VA face difficulties sharing information across agencies
  - Government-wide coordination lacking
  - Recommended Congress authorize a coordinating entity to develop federal disability strategy
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## FEDERAL DISABILITY PROGRAMS: Coordination Could Facilitate Better Data Collection to Assess the Status of People with Disabilities (GAO-08-872T)

- Reviewed limitations of disability data (based on prior work)
  - Reported: (1) success measured by program outcomes, not overall impact that federal programs have on people with disabilities; (2) inconsistent data definitions across national surveys
  - Underscored need for: common outcome measures and a coordinating entity to develop an overall federal disability strategy
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## GAO's current strategic planning effort:

- **Identify additional steps to inform the nation's understanding, debate and action toward modernizing federal disability programs.**
  - **Inform future GAO studies and potential forums.**
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## GAO's current planning effort (continued):

- **Near-term objectives - Focusing on the working age persons with disabilities with the goal of improving participation in work:**
    - (1) identify alternative frameworks and promising proposals to align disability definitions, goals, and policies
    - (2) explore the viability and implications of these frameworks and proposals for new and existing programs.
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## RELATED GAO STUDIES: GPRA

- Results-Oriented Government: Practices That Can Help Enhance and Sustain Collaboration among Federal Agencies. GAO-06-15. Washington, D.C.: October 21, 2005.
  - Results-Oriented Government: GPRA Has Established a Solid Foundation for Achieving Greater Results. GAO-04-38. Washington, D.C.: March 10, 2004.
  - Agency Performance Plans: Examples of Practices That Can Improve Usefulness to Decisionmakers. GAO/GGD/AIMD-99-69. Washington, D.C.: February 26, 1999.
  - Agencies' Annual Performance Plans Under the Results Act: An Assessment Guide to Facilitate Congressional Decisionmaking. GAO/GGD/AIMD-10.1.18. Washington, D.C.: February 1998.
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## RELATED GAO STUDIES: High Risk; 21st Century Challenges

- High-Risk Series: An Update, GAO-09-271. Washington, D.C.: January 2009.
  - 21st Century Challenges: Transforming Government to Meet Current and Emerging Challenges, GAO-05-830T. Washington, DC.: July 13, 2005.
  - 21st Century Challenges: Reexamining the Base of the Federal Government, GAO-05-325SP. Washington, February 2005.
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## RELATED GAO STUDIES: National Indicators

- A Call for Stewardship: Enhancing the Federal Government's Ability to Address Key Fiscal and Other 21st Century Challenges. GAO-08-93SP. Washington, D.C.: December 2007.
  - Informing Our Nation: Improving How to Understand and Assess the USA's Position and Progress. GAO-05-1. Washington, D.C.: November 10, 2004.
  - Forum on Key National Indicators: Assessing the Nation's Position and Progress. GAO-03-672SP. Washington, D.C.: May 2003.
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## RELATED GAO STUDIES: Disability

- Federal Disability Programs: Coordination Could Facilitate Better Data Collection to Assess the Status of People with Disabilities. GAO-08-872T. Washington, D.C.: June 4, 2008.
  - Federal Disability Programs: More Strategic Coordination Could Help Overcome Challenges to Needed Transformation. GAO-08-635. Washington, D.C.: May 20, 2008.
  - Highlights of a GAO Forum: Modernizing Federal Disability Policy. GAO-07-934SP. Washington, D.C.: August 3, 2007.
  - Federal Disability Assistance: Wide Array of Programs Needs to Be Examined in Light of 21st Century Challenges. GAO-05-626. Washington, D.C.: June 2, 2005.
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