

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-22-105195](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Over the past 10 years, VA's contract obligations nearly doubled in size to \$38 billion in fiscal year 2021. The increase was driven in part by key program growth and efforts to modernize VA systems. GAO added VA's acquisition management to its High-Risk List in 2019 due to numerous challenges to efficiently purchasing goods and services, including medical supplies.

GAO was asked to examine how VA manages major acquisitions, which Office of Management and Budget guidance identify as requiring special management attention. This report assesses the extent to which VA acquisitions are following the current acquisition management framework and the extent to which VA is positioned to implement its proposed acquisition framework, among other objectives. To conduct this assessment, GAO reviewed relevant VA policies and guidance; analyzed VA program documents for a mix of IT modernization efforts and service acquisitions; and interviewed VA officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making seven recommendations. These include establishing a mechanism to collect and monitor program costs, assessing workforce gaps, aligning the proposed framework with other agency processes, identifying a mechanism to ensure compliance, and ensuring these steps are taken before implementation of the new framework. VA agreed with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-22-105195](#). For more information, contact Shelby S. Oakley at (202) 512-4841 or OakleyS@gao.gov.

August 2022

VA ACQUISITION MANAGEMENT

Action Needed to Ensure Success of New Oversight Framework

What GAO Found

For over a decade, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has worked to implement a framework for managing how it purchases goods and services, with little success. GAO found that VA has not used its Acquisition Program Management Framework, its current framework, which has been in place since 2017. This framework includes features—such as phases, key documents, and identified decision authorities—that could provide standardized management and oversight of VA's major acquisitions. These features generally align with GAO-identified acquisition leading practices. However, VA's major acquisition programs that GAO reviewed instead use program-specific approaches that vary widely in robustness.

VA plans to implement its proposed acquisition framework—the Acquisition Lifecycle Framework—in 2022. Plans for the new framework include features and processes similar to those of the current one. However, VA and its acquisition programs are not well-positioned to successfully implement the new framework because VA plans to implement it before addressing challenges that hindered adoption of its predecessor. For example:

- **Identifying programs subject to the framework.** VA has yet to develop a list of major acquisitions that would be subject to increased oversight within the framework because it lacks a mechanism to collect and monitor acquisition program costs. Without such a mechanism, VA will struggle to identify acquisition programs subject to increased oversight within the framework.
- **Assessing acquisition workforce needs.** VA identified gaps in its acquisition workforce that affected programs' ability to implement the existing framework. Since VA has yet to assess its current workforce to determine whether gaps still exist, it will not know if current staff levels and skillsets are adequate to effectively support the new framework.
- **Aligning the framework with other processes.** VA planned to align its current framework with IT program and major construction project management processes, but it issued potentially confusing guidance as to which processes to follow. VA has yet to provide clear direction to integrate the new framework with its IT and other management processes, increasing the risk it will not be implemented effectively.
- **Ensuring framework compliance.** VA identified that the lack of a mechanism to ensure that acquisition programs adopt its framework was a weakness when it implemented its current framework. But VA has yet to establish and communicate a mechanism to ensure program compliance with its new framework, risking a repeat of limited adoption.

VA's current plans to implement the new framework in 2022 do not provide the department time to address these challenges. If VA does not take steps to address these challenges prior to implementing the new Acquisition Lifecycle Framework, then VA will face increased risks of another unsuccessful implementation that does not achieve meaningful improvements in management of its major acquisitions.