

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-16-446](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Research has shown that early intervention can greatly improve the development of a child with autism. Children with disabilities—including children with autism—can receive intervention services through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Low income children may also receive intervention services through Medicaid or CHIP, health care programs overseen at the federal level by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services and administered by the states. Children of servicemembers may receive services through TRICARE, DOD's health care program.

GAO was asked to review federal autism efforts. This report describes (1) how federal agencies encourage early autism identification and interventions, and (2) the intervention services provided by federal education and health care programs. It also (3) examines steps taken by HHS and federal agencies to improve research coordination. GAO collected information on education programs in five states that were selected for size, activities, and variation in geographic location. GAO analyzed health care program data: fiscal year 2014 TRICARE data and fiscal year 2013 Medicaid and CHIP data—the most recent data available at the time of the review—from another five states selected based on the availability of reliable data. GAO also monitored the implementation of its 2013 recommendations to improve autism research coordination. Education and HHS provided comments on a draft of this report and disagreed that there is potential for unnecessary duplication. GAO continues to believe improved coordination is needed.

View [GAO-16-446](#). For more information, contact Marcia Crosse at (202) 512-7114 or crossem@gao.gov

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FEDERAL AUTISM ACTIVITIES

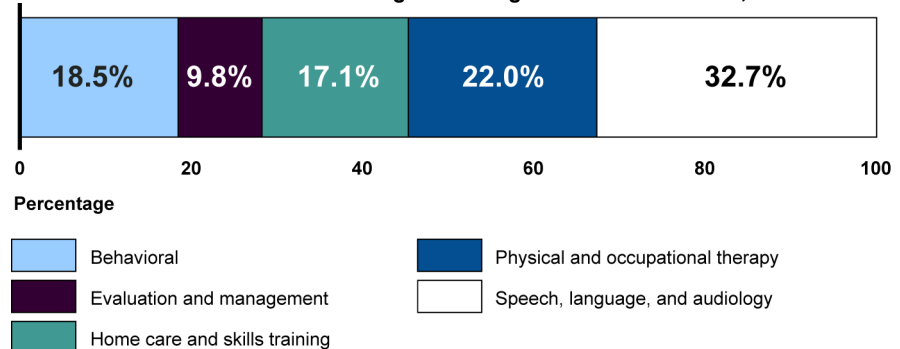
Agencies Are Encouraging Early Identification and Providing Services, and Recent Actions Could Improve Coordination

What GAO Found

Federal agencies have taken various actions to encourage early autism identification and interventions, such as specifically soliciting research in these areas. From fiscal year 2012 through fiscal year 2015, the departments of Defense (DOD), Education, and Health and Human Services (HHS), awarded about \$395 million for research on early identification and interventions for autism.

Federal programs provide a variety of intervention services to young children with autism. When examining the education programs administered by five states and DOD, GAO found that specific actions were taken to help respond to the individual intervention needs of children with autism. Children enrolled in federal health care programs—Medicaid, the State Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), or TRICARE—received a variety of interventions. For example, GAO identified about 8,200 young children with autism in five states enrolled in Medicaid or CHIP and found that speech, language, and audiology services were the most common overall; however, the types of services commonly received varied, depending on the age of the child.

Percentage of Total Intervention Services by Service Category, for Medicaid and CHIP Beneficiaries Identified with Autism Ages 1 through 5 in Selected States, Fiscal Year 2013



Source: GAO analysis of fiscal year 2013 Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, and Minnesota Medicaid and State Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) data reported to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. | GAO-16-446

HHS has recently taken actions required by the Autism Collaboration, Accountability, Research, Education, and Support Act of 2014 (Autism CARES Act) that could help coordinate federal autism research and implement GAO's prior recommendations. For example, in April 2016, HHS designated an autism coordinator to oversee national autism research, services, and support activities. In 2013, GAO reported that there was limited coordination among agencies. This was especially concerning because GAO also found that 11 federal agencies funded autism research in the same areas—resulting in the potential for unnecessary duplication. At that time, GAO recommended that HHS improve the data it collects on autism research and that federal agencies develop methods to monitor and coordinate this research. GAO believes that HHS's continued fulfillment of certain provisions in the Autism CARES Act could help the department implement GAO's 2013 recommendations.