

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-24-106130](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

The U.S. faces a nutrition-related health crisis, according to recent federal data. Poor diet is a prominent risk factor for developing chronic health conditions. Dietary patterns emphasizing fruits, vegetables, and whole grains are associated with lower risk of developing diet-related chronic health conditions. HHS and USDA produce the dietary guidelines every 5 years to provide nutrition guidance reflecting the scientific consensus.

GAO was asked to review federal efforts to promote the current guidelines and identify research needed to inform future editions of the guidelines. This report (1) describes actions selected agencies have taken to promote the 2020-2025 guidelines and (2) examines HHS and USDA efforts to collaborate to identify and prioritize human nutrition research that may inform future editions.

GAO reviewed laws and agencies' documents and interviewed officials from DOD, HHS, USDA, and VA. GAO compared agency efforts with leading interagency collaboration practices identified in prior work. GAO interviewed a nongeneralizable sample of 10 stakeholders, such as academic researchers, selected based on their expertise.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making two recommendations that the Secretaries of HHS and USDA ensure that the Assistant Secretary of Health and the USDA Chief Scientist—as co-chairs of the committee—fully incorporate seven leading collaboration practices, such as ensuring accountability. HHS generally agreed. USDA neither agreed nor disagreed.

View [GAO-24-106130](#). For more information, contact Steve Morris at (202) 512-3841 or morris@gao.gov.

October 2023

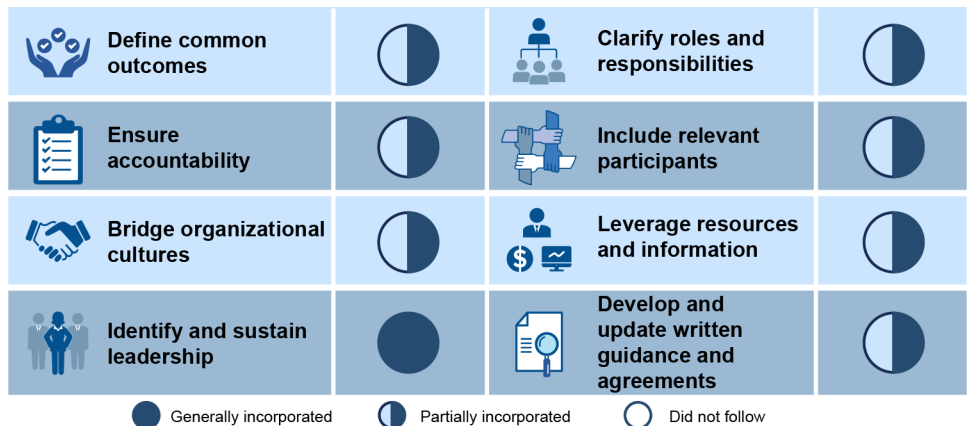
DIETARY GUIDELINES FOR AMERICANS

Strengthening Interagency Collaboration Could Help Inform Nutrition Research and Future Guidelines

What GAO Found

The Departments of Defense (DOD), Health and Human Services (HHS), Agriculture (USDA), and Veterans Affairs (VA) are taking various actions to promote the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. These guidelines contain nutritional and dietary information and guidance for the public, as required by law. For example, USDA updated MyPlate, which provides online tools and resources that translate the guidelines for consumer use. In addition, HHS and USDA co-chair a committee that, as required by law, reviews federal nutrition educational materials to ensure consistency with the current guidelines.

Assessment of Interagency Committee on Human Nutrition Research Efforts Compared with Leading Practices for Interagency Collaboration



Sources: GAO-23-105520 and GAO analysis of Interagency Committee on Human Nutrition Research interviews and information; Vector (icons). | GAO-24-106130

HHS and USDA co-chair the Interagency Committee on Human Nutrition Research, through which they collaborate to inform Dietary Guidelines for Americans related nutrition research priorities. The committee has taken various actions to inform nutrition research but has not fully incorporated seven of the eight leading practices identified by GAO for ensuring agencies are effectively collaborating and thereby reducing the risk of overlap and duplication (see fig.). The committee has generally incorporated one of these practices to identify and sustain its leadership but has not incorporated others, such as ensuring accountability and clarifying roles and responsibilities. For example, for ensuring accountability, the committee does not have any mechanisms for tracking progress toward addressing nutrition research gaps, such as the relationship between diet during lactation and infant development outcomes. In addition, for clarifying roles and responsibilities, the committee has not taken actions to ensure that the research each agency conducts is complementary and not overlapping or duplicative. By fully incorporating these seven leading collaboration practices, the committee may be better able to identify and prioritize nutrition research related to addressing gaps identified in prior editions of the guidelines and informing future editions of the dietary guidelines. Doing so would also help the committee avoid the risks of unintentionally overlapping and duplicative research activities.