

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-18-208](#), a report to the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, Subcommittee on Information Technology

Why GAO Did This Study

VA operates the largest health care delivery system in America and VistA is essential to helping deliver the health care services and ensure the quality of health care received by the nation's veterans and their dependents. The system has been in operation for more than 30 years, is costly to maintain, and does not readily support VA's need to electronically exchange health records with the Department of Defense and private health care providers. VA has pursued initiatives to modernize VistA, using government contractors to support its efforts. In June 2017, VA announced a new effort to purchase a commercial solution to replace VistA.

GAO was requested to review VA's prior and current efforts to modernize VistA. This review determined (1) VA's efforts to modernize VistA, including key contractors, contract costs, and expected contractor activities and (2) VA's current plans for modernizing VistA and the progress that has been achieved to date. To conduct its study, GAO reviewed VA documentation and its prior work and requested and obtained data on contracts, related obligations, and expected contractor activities for previous efforts. GAO also obtained documentation on plans for VA's current modernization efforts and progress made on the efforts, and interviewed VA officials.

GAO has made recommendations to VA aimed at improving its prior modernization efforts. The department concurred with the recommendations and generally took responsive actions. GAO is making no recommendations at this time. VA provided technical comments on this report, which were incorporated as appropriate.

View [GAO-18-208](#). For more information, contact David A. Powner at (202) 512-9286 or pownerd@gao.gov.

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VA HEALTH IT MODERNIZATION

Historical Perspective on Prior Contracts and Update on Plans for New Initiative

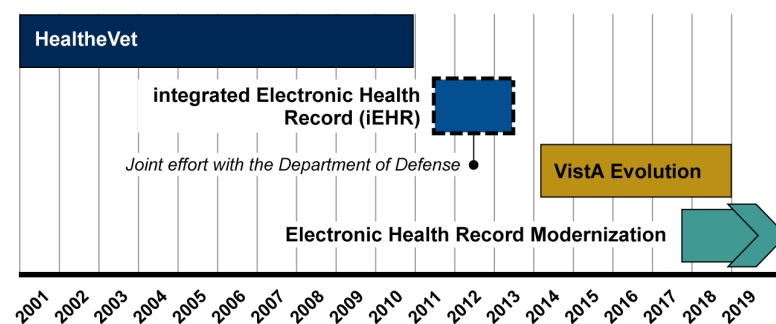
What GAO Found

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has, since 2001, pursued four separate initiatives to modernize its health information system—the Veterans Health Information Systems and Technology Architecture (VistA). These efforts—HealthVet, the integrated Electronic Health Record (iEHR), VistA Evolution, and the Electronic Health Record Modernization (EHRM)—reflect varying approaches that the department has considered to achieve a modernized health system over the course of nearly two decades (see figure). This latest effort, the EHRM program, is to include the adoption of the same commercial electronic health record system that the Department of Defense is in the process of acquiring.

VA obligated about \$1.1 billion to 138 different contractors that worked on iEHR and VistA Evolution (the two efforts for which VA could provide contract data) during fiscal years 2011 through 2016. Funding for the 34 contractors that worked on both efforts totaled about \$793 million of the \$1.1 billion obligated for contracts on the two initiatives. The top 15 of the contractors that worked on the two efforts (key contractors) accounted for approximately \$741 million—\$411 million for the development of new system capabilities, \$256 million for project management activities, and \$74 million for operations and maintenance for iEHR and VistA Evolution.

VA has begun planning for the transition from VistA Evolution to EHRM. However, the department is still early in its efforts and has begun developing plans that are intended to guide the new EHRM program. According to the EHRM Executive Director, the department intends to complete development of its plans for EHRM within 90 days after awarding the contract for its new system, which is planned to occur in early 2018. VA has also begun to staff the EHRM program's leadership positions. The department's dedication to completing and effectively executing the planning activities that it has identified will be essential to helping minimize program risks and expeditiously guide this latest electronic health record modernization initiative to a successful outcome—which VA, for almost two decades, has been unable to achieve.

Timeline of Four Efforts to Modernize VistA



Fiscal years

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Veterans Affairs data. | GAO-18-208