

## Why GAO Did This Study

Biometrics technologies that collect and facilitate the sharing of fingerprint records, and other identity data, are important to national security and federal agencies recognize the need to share such information. The Department of Defense (DOD) plans to spend \$3.5 billion for fiscal years 2007 to 2015 on biometrics. GAO was asked to examine the extent to which DOD has (1) adopted standards and taken actions to facilitate the collection of biometrics that are interoperable with other key federal agencies, and (2) shares biometric information across key federal agencies. To address these objectives, GAO reviewed documents including those related to standards for collection, storage, and sharing of biometrics; visited selected facilities that analyze and store such information; and interviewed key federal officials.

## What GAO Recommends

To improve DOD's ability to collect and share information, GAO recommends that DOD implement processes for updating and testing biometric collection devices to adopted standards; fully define and clarify the roles and responsibilities for all biometric stakeholders; finalize an agreement with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS); and identify its long-term biometric system capability needs. DOD agreed with all of GAO's recommendations.

## DEFENSE BIOMETRICS

### DOD Can Better Conform to Standards and Share Biometric Information with Federal Agencies

## What GAO Found

DOD has adopted a standard for the collection of biometric information to facilitate sharing of that information with other federal agencies. DOD recognized the importance of interoperability and directed adherence to internationally accepted biometric standards. DOD applied adopted standards in some but not all of its collection devices. Specifically, a collection device used primarily by the Army does not meet DOD adopted standards. As a result, DOD is unable to automatically transmit biometric information collected to federal agencies, such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). For example, this device is responsible for 13 percent of the records maintained by DOD—the largest number of submissions collected by a handheld device, according to DOD. Further, this constitutes approximately 630,000 DOD biometric records that cannot be searched automatically against FBI's approximately 94 million. DOD has not taken certain actions that would likely improve its adherence to standards, all of which are based on criteria from the Standard for Program Management, the National Science and Technology Council, and the Office of Management and Budget guidance, respectively. First, DOD does not have an effective process, procedure, or timeline for implementing updated standards. Second, DOD does not routinely test at sufficient levels of detail for conformance to these standards. Third, DOD has not fully defined roles and responsibilities specifying accountability needed to ensure its collection devices meet new and updated standards.

DOD is sharing its biometric information and has an agreement to share biometric information with the Department of Justice, which allows for direct connectivity and the automated sharing of biometric information between their biometric systems. DOD's ability to optimize sharing is limited by not having a finalized sharing agreement with DHS, and its capacity to process biometric information. Currently, DOD and DHS do not have a finalized agreement in place to allow direct connectivity between their biometric systems. DOD is working with DHS to develop a memorandum of understanding to share biometric information now scheduled for completion in May 2011; however, without the agreement, it is unclear whether direct connectivity will be established between DOD and DHS, which affects response times to search queries. Further, agencies' biometric systems have varying system capacities based on their mission needs, which affects their ability to similarly process each other's queries for biometric information. As a result, DOD and other agency officials have expressed concern that DOD's biometric system may be unable to meet the search demands from their other biometric systems over the long-term. DOD officials do not believe that they need to match other agencies' biometric system capacities because they do not anticipate receiving the same number of queries given differences in mission. However, the advancements other agencies make in their biometric systems may continue to overwhelm DOD's efforts as it works to identify its long-term biometric system capability needs and associated costs.