



Highlights of [GAO-08-582](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)—an agency in the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)—has experienced an expanding workload due to emerging health threats, such as bioterrorism. Strategic planning helps agencies like CDC sustain a workforce with the necessary education, skills, and competencies—human capital—to fulfill their missions. In September 2007, CDC released its Strategic Human Capital Management Plan (CDC Plan). GAO was asked to review CDC's human capital planning. GAO determined (1) whether the CDC Plan was designed to address the human capital challenges CDC faces; (2) the extent to which the CDC Plan is strategically aligned with agency goals, plans, and budget; and (3) the extent to which CDC incorporated GAO's principles for strategic human capital planning. To do so, GAO interviewed officials and analyzed data and documents.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that CDC address the challenge of managing a workforce with a large and growing number of contractors in CDC Plan updates. In its comments on a draft, HHS indicated that GAO implied that CDC should treat contractors as if they were federal employees and it lacked adequate oversight of them. GAO believes HHS misinterpreted the recommendation, which is to ensure that CDC's human capital planning encompasses strategies for the use of its federal employee and contractor resources.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-582](#). For more information, contact Cynthia A. Bascetta, 202-512-7114, bascettac@gao.gov.

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION

Human Capital Planning Has Improved, but Strategic View of Contractor Workforce Is Needed

What GAO Found

GAO identified six key challenges CDC faces in its efforts to sustain a skilled workforce to fulfill its mission and goals, and the CDC Plan includes strategies that could help the agency address five of them. These challenges are (1) changing workforce demographics, highlighted by the potential loss of essential personnel due to retirement; (2) the limited supply of skilled public health professionals; (3) CDC's acknowledged need to increase the diversity of its workforce; (4) changing workforce needs resulting from the agency's expanding scope of work and responsibilities; (5) logistical difficulties involved in acquiring and retaining a skilled workforce; and (6) difficulties presented by managing a workforce with a large and growing number of contractors. While the CDC Plan includes strategies designed to address the first five challenges, it does not address the challenge involving contractors, which represent more than one-third of its workforce. Thus, the CDC Plan may not be as useful as it could be to provide a strategic view of its contractor workforce and to assist the agency with managing all of its human capital.

The CDC Plan only partially meets the criteria for strategic alignment: the strategies in it are linked with the agency's mission and goals, but they are not integrated with the documents that serve as the strategic plan, performance plan, or budget. According to CDC officials, the agency will update the CDC Plan annually and will integrate it with these documents as it is updated.

CDC incorporated aspects of all of GAO's principles of strategic human capital planning into the CDC Plan and has outlined intended actions that could further incorporate the principles in subsequent updates. CDC partially incorporated the first principle—to involve managers, other employees, and stakeholders in developing, communicating, and implementing the human capital plan—by formally involving management and stakeholders in plan development. CDC intends to involve other employees in implementation and future updates. CDC partially incorporated the second principle—to determine the skills and competencies needed to achieve agency mission and goals, including identifying skill and competency gaps—by conducting a preliminary workforce analysis. The agency had not completed its analyses of skill and competency gaps for the occupations it deemed most critical when the plan was developed, but has now completed an analysis for one critical occupation and is conducting others. The plan partially follows the third principle—to develop strategies to acquire, retain, and develop a skilled workforce and to address gaps. CDC developed strategies for its plan and intends to target gaps once they are identified. CDC has incorporated the fourth principle—to build capabilities to support the strategies—through such activities as ongoing efforts to streamline hiring. The fifth principle is to monitor and evaluate the contribution that strategies have made toward achieving mission and goals. The agency indicated in the CDC Plan that it intends to monitor and evaluate its strategies as part of its implementation activities. Further incorporation of GAO's principles into plan updates could help the agency strengthen its human capital efforts.