

Highlights of a Forum: Actions that Could Increase Work Participation for Adults with Disabilities

**United States Government Accountability
Office (GAO)**

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What is GAO?

- GAO is a non-partisan, independent agency of the U.S. Congress
 - GAO's mission
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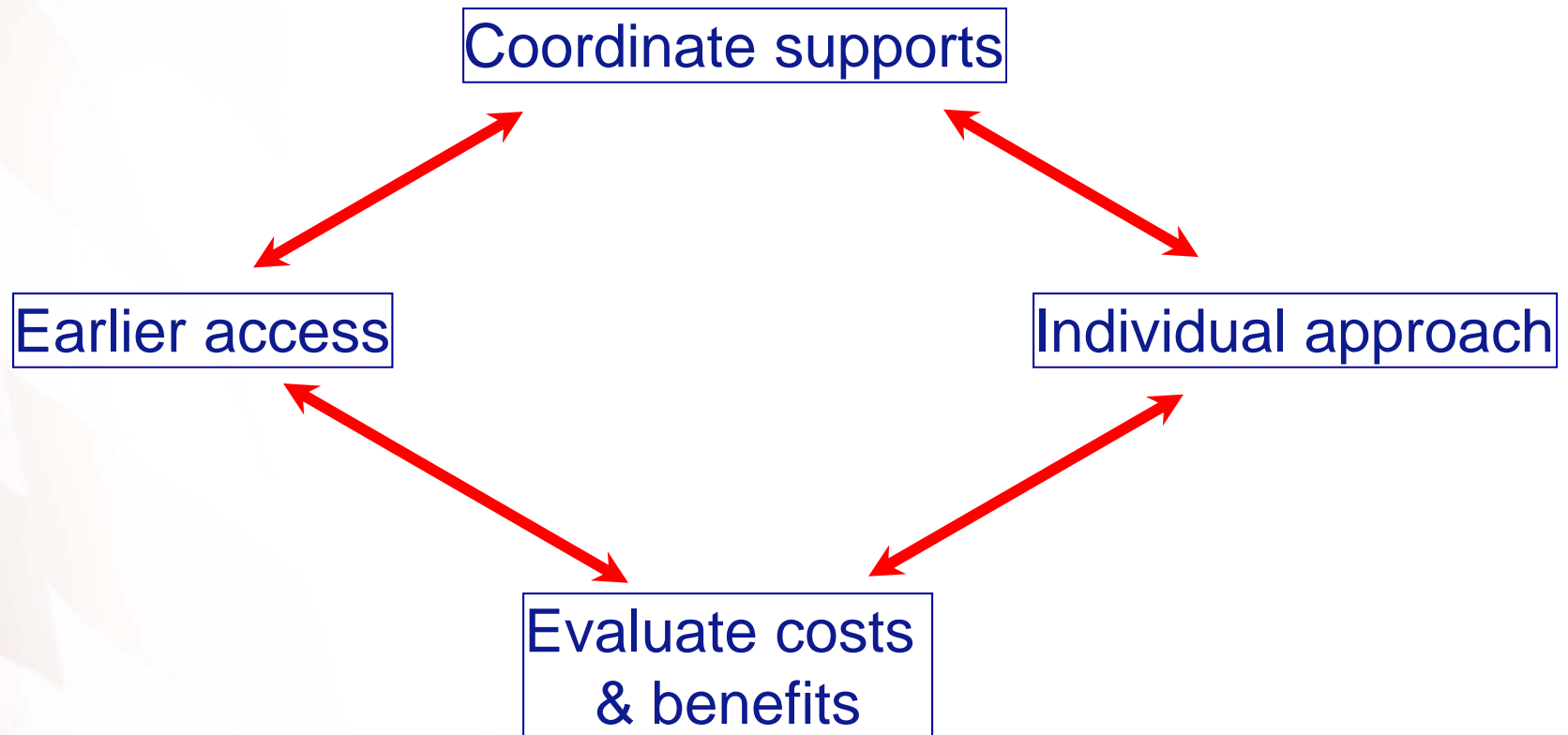
Why we held our forum

- Modernizing federal disability programs has been on GAO's high risk list since 2003, in part, for:
 - Lack of coordination among many programs
 - Outdated definitions of disability
 - Lack of focus on return-to-work and stay-at-work options
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Our methods

- 2 iterative surveys sent to 60 experts
 - 17 experts met for a 1-day forum (March 16, 2010)
 - Full group prioritized 3 topics
 - Breakout groups identified key actions
 - Full group discussed actions and federal role
 - This presentation summarizes panelists' discussions
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Topic 1: Improve individuals' incentives while strengthening supports



Topic 1: Individual incentives (cont'd)

- Revising incentives raises the challenge of avoiding unintended consequences:
 - Forcing a choice between work and benefits
 - Removing supports before employment is sustainable
 - Failing to protect those who cannot work
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Topic 2: Educate employers about the benefits of retaining or hiring individuals

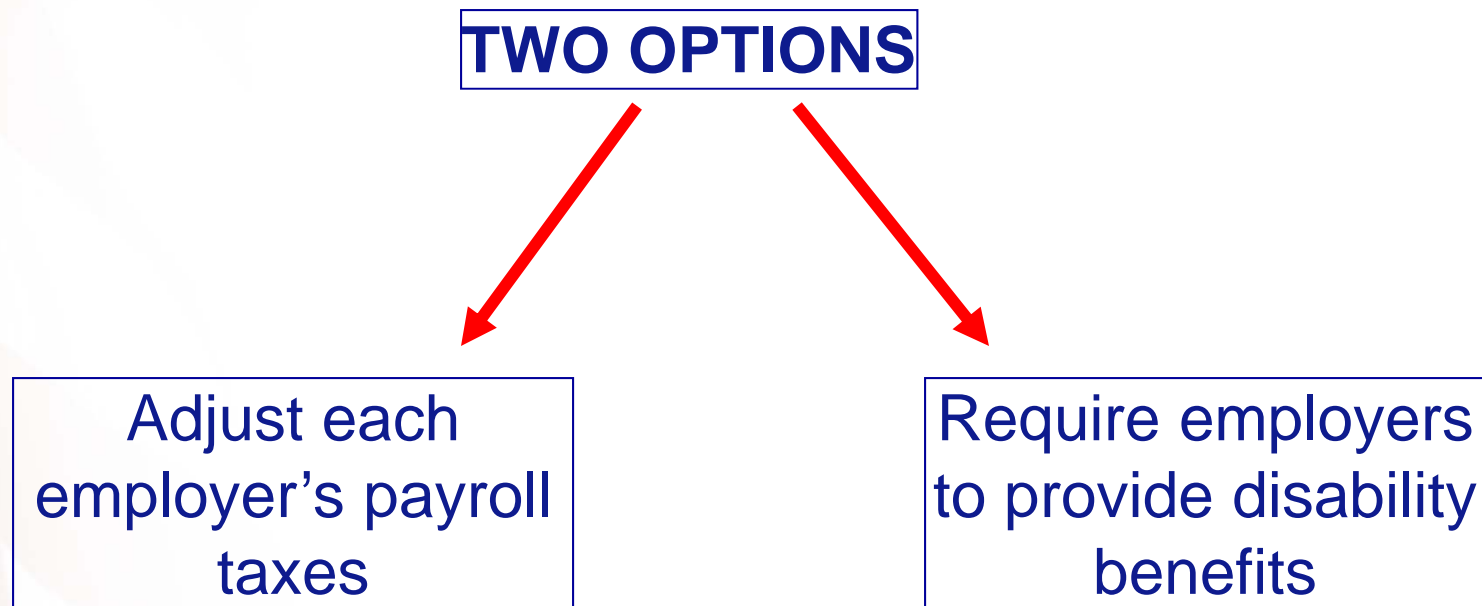
- Develop a well-structured and credible information campaign that includes:
 - Industry specific data collected and reported by a reputable firm
 - Examples of effective practices
 - Input from disability and business groups
 - Marketing using various media
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Topic 2: Educate employers (cont'd)

- Benefits of a successful campaign:
 - Greater retention
 - Less reliance on public benefits
 - Challenges to be addressed:
 - Disappointing impact of past campaigns
 - Perceptions of some disabilities
 - Campaign does not alter existing incentives
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Topic 3: Increase employers' financial incentives to retain employees

- Employers do not bear long-term costs of disabilities



Topic 3: Increase employer incentives (cont'd)

- Both options face potential challenges:
 - Avoid creating disincentives to hire individuals
 - Privacy concerns
 - Adjusting taxes for small businesses could be difficult
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Federal Role: Government should coordinate efforts

- Divided responsibility a major obstacle to improved outcomes
 - Panelists highlighted the need for a coordinating body
 - Suggestion consistent with past GAO work
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Federal Role: White House should provide strong leadership

- Past efforts failed because they lacked:
 - Authority
 - Accountability
 - Resources

 - President urged to:
 - Set clear goals
 - Hold agencies accountable
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Federal Role: Government should be a model employer

- Lead by example in hiring individuals with disabilities
 - Agencies need to better understand hiring authority
 - More research could benefit disability management
 - Data on federal employees not regularly updated
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More information on our work

- Our full report is available at no cost on GAO Web site at <http://www.gao.gov>
 - Internal strategic planning efforts to identify and prioritize follow on work continue.
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