

## United States Senate

September 8, 2017

COMMITTEES:  
ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS  
FINANCE  
FOREIGN RELATIONS  
SMALL BUSINESS

COMMISSION ON SECURITY  
AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro  
Comptroller General of the United States  
Government Accountability Office  
441 G St., NW  
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Comptroller Dodaro:

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. This saying attributed to Benjamin Franklin is an apt description of the benefits of climate change adaptation—a risk management strategy to reduce federal fiscal exposure to the impacts of climate change. For example, in 2005, the National Institute of Building Sciences estimated that society saved \$4 for every \$1 dollar that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) invested in programs designed to lessen the impacts of disasters by making communities more resilient. The benefits of adaptation are expected to increase over time as climate change increases the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events such as heavy rainfall that results in flooding.

Thus far, most federal adaptation activities have focused on building forward-looking climate information into activities the federal government already conducts. For example, the Department of Defense has focused on how to make its more than 550,000 defense facilities more resilient to changes in the climate. However, climate change cuts across agency missions and poses fiscal exposures that are larger than any one agency can manage. State, local, and private-sector decision makers also drive federal climate-related fiscal exposures because they are responsible for planning, constructing, and maintaining vulnerable infrastructure paid for with federal funds, insured by federal programs, or eligible for federal disaster assistance. In other words, the federal government must address impacts that affect many sectors and geographic scales that transcend the manner in which the federal government normally functions.

The federal government has not prioritized or identified how to pay for such adaptation projects of national significance—projects that achieve climate resiliency which cannot be achieved by individual federal agencies or state or local governments. Further, while federal agencies have engaged in numerous adaptation efforts, there appears to be no agreement upon which adaptation projects of national significance should be the focus of the federal government's limited planning and funding resources.


In this context, I would like GAO to report on the following questions:

- What is known about the benefits of planned adaptation actions in reducing the need for costly response activities?
- What federal mechanisms have been developed and are in place to prioritize and fund adaptation projects of national significance and to what extent have federal agencies used these mechanisms?

- What are the strengths and limitations of additional options for prioritizing and funding adaptation projects of national significance?

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter. If you have any questions regarding this request, please coordinate with Mae Stevens of my staff at (202) 228-6429 ([Mae\\_Stevens@cardin.senate.gov](mailto:Mae_Stevens@cardin.senate.gov)).

Sincerely,



Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator