

Congress says the Army can't spend \$400 million buying Microsoft HoloLens headsets



Congress has denied the Army's request to buy up to 6,900 headsets based on Microsoft's HoloLens technology, according to a report from *Bloomberg*. The military was apparently asking for around \$400 million – instead, it's getting around a tenth of that to go toward improving the system, as previous versions reportedly caused "mission-affecting physical impairments," such as headaches and nausea during tests.

It was those results that reportedly led to the budget for new headsets, called Integrated Visual Augmentation Systems or IVAS by the Army, not being included in the government's \$1.75 trillion spending bill. The Army says it plans to fix those, though, with a version 1.2 that will include "a new form factor" meant to address the physical symptoms, as well as "a lower profile heads-up display with distributed counterweight for improved user interface and comfort" and software improvements.

In a statement published earlier this month, the Army said it would place orders for completed 1.2 IVAS headsets “after qualification and operational testing.” So far, around 1,000 soldiers have provided feedback based on 100,000 hours of testing with previous versions. According to *Bloomberg*, it awarded Microsoft around \$125 million to develop version 1.2, in addition to the \$40 million that Congress recently approved.

The headsets are part of a potentially multibillion-dollar contract between Microsoft and the Army and have been in development since 2018. The purpose of the IVAS is to provide soldiers with real-time information from sensors and navigation systems, as well as night and thermal vision and augmented-reality training.

So far, the Army has ordered around 5,000 headsets, but its contract could let it order up to 120,000 over a decade. It’s not necessarily a surprise that Congress is putting the brakes on new orders for now, though; in 2022, a Senate committee reportedly slashed the Army’s procurement request for more headsets in 2023 in a preview of what would happen with the budget.

<https://www.theverge.com/2023/1/12/23552132/microsoft-hololens-army-contract-denied-v1-2-improvements>