

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-14-326](#), a report to the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

DOD spends billions of dollars annually to sustain weapon systems. With the prospect of tighter defense budgets, DOD has placed more attention on controlling total life-cycle costs with initiatives aimed at ensuring that weapon systems are more affordable over the long term. Section 2337 of Title 10, U.S. Code, requires that each major weapon system be supported by a PSM and lays out the responsibilities of the PSM, including developing and implementing a comprehensive product support strategy for the system. GAO was asked to review DOD's progress in implementing PSMs for major weapon systems.

This report examines (1) the steps, if any, that DOD and the military services have taken to implement PSMs for major weapon systems and (2) the extent to which DOD has evaluated the effects, if any, that PSMs are having on life-cycle sustainment decisions for their assigned systems. To conduct this review, GAO obtained information and interviewed product support personnel assigned to 12 of 332 major weapon systems that reflected varying characteristics—such as military service and system costs—and analyzed documentation from DOD and the military services.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD and the services develop a plan to institutionalize a career path for PSMs; issue clear, comprehensive, and centralized PSM implementation guidance; evaluate the effects PSMs have on sustainment decisions; and improve Army PSMs' visibility over sustainment funding. DOD generally agreed with the recommendations.

View [GAO-14-326](#). For more information, contact Cary Russell at (202) 512-5431 or [russellc@gao.gov](mailto:russellc@gao.gov).

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## WEAPON SYSTEMS MANAGEMENT

### DOD Has Taken Steps to Implement Product Support Managers but Needs to Evaluate Their Effects

## What GAO Found

The Department of Defense (DOD) and the military services have taken steps to implement Product Support Managers (PSM) for major weapon systems, but certain aspects of the implementation process remain incomplete. The services have assigned PSMs to almost all of their major weapon systems. For example, as of February 2014, 325 of 332 PSM position requirements across DOD for major weapon systems—approximately 98 percent—were filled. While DOD and all of the services have taken some steps to develop a comprehensive career path and associated guidance to develop, train, and support future PSMs, DOD, in coordination with the military services, has not developed a plan—to include objectives, milestones, and resources—to implement and institutionalize a comprehensive PSM career path. Until DOD develops such a plan, it may not be able to ensure that the services can fill PSM positions with qualified personnel in the future. Moreover, DOD's PSM implementation guidance is not centralized and future product support personnel may be hindered in their ability to easily access and implement such guidance. Also, because the latest DOD guidance lacks detail and contains a potentially unclear provision, personnel may confuse the responsibilities of Program Managers and PSMs. Without clear, comprehensive, and centralized implementation guidance, DOD may be hindered in its ability to institutionalize the implementation of PSMs for its major weapon systems going forward. Additionally, the Army has been working for a year to clarify the roles and responsibilities of certain product support personnel, who support PSMs, for the sustainment portion of the life cycle for major weapon systems. According to officials from the Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Acquisition, Logistics and Technology, major weapon systems program offices have raised the issue of the lack of clear roles and responsibilities of these personnel, which has prompted senior-level Army meetings to attempt to resolve the issue. However, the Army has not yet finalized guidance that clarifies roles and responsibilities, which may hinder PSMs in their ability to effectively manage and conduct their daily product support responsibilities.

DOD does not fully know how or to what extent PSMs are affecting life-cycle sustainment decisions because it has not systematically collected and evaluated information on the effects PSMs are having on their assigned weapon systems. Program evaluation guidance states that evaluations can play a key role in program planning, management, and oversight by providing feedback to managers on programs. Evaluations can show whether PSMs are conducting good practices that could be shared across the department as well as whether changes are needed to guidance or other areas to enhance the contributions of PSMs. In the absence of DOD information on the effects PSMs are having on life-cycle sustainment decisions, weapon system program offices identified several good practices and challenges associated with PSMs. For example, several PSMs told us that they had initiated analyses focused on reducing life-cycle sustainment costs for their assigned weapon systems. One challenge that Army headquarters officials noted was that PSMs do not have knowledge of how much sustainment funding their systems will receive prior to the year of execution of funds. Without greater visibility over the allocation of sustainment funding for their assigned weapon systems, these PSMs may be hindered in their ability to proactively manage and influence their system's life-cycle sustainment decisions.