

## Why GAO Did This Study

In fiscal year 2014, DHS reported it planned to spend approximately \$10.7 billion on its major acquisition programs. DHS acquires systems to reduce the probability of a terrorist attack, protect against disease, mitigate natural hazards, and secure borders. Partially in response to GAO recommendations, the department has taken steps to improve acquisition management in recent years, but has not yet implemented many of these recommendations.

GAO was asked to review DHS's oversight of its major acquisition programs. This report addresses (1) steps DHS has taken to improve oversight and gaps that exist, if any, and (2) whether the data PARM provides to DHS and congressional decision makers are accurate and up-to-date.

GAO reviewed DHS policies and procedures and interviewed oversight and acquisition officials from all nine DHS components with at least one major acquisition program with a life-cycle cost estimate exceeding \$1 billion. From these components, GAO selected a non-generalizable sample of nine major acquisition programs with a variety of characteristics to compare PARM oversight activities and review program data.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DHS take a number of actions including developing written guidance for a consistent approach to oversight, addressing programs in sustainment, and enhancing data quality and reports to Congress. DHS concurred with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-15-292](#). For more information, contact Michele Mackin at (202) 512-4841 or [mackinm@gao.gov](mailto:mackinm@gao.gov).

## HOMELAND SECURITY ACQUISITIONS

### DHS Should Better Define Oversight Roles and Improve Program Reporting to Congress

## What GAO Found

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has taken steps to improve oversight of major acquisition programs, but it lacks written guidance for a consistent approach to day-to-day oversight. Federal *Standards for Internal Control* call for organizations to define and document key areas of responsibility in order to effectively plan, direct, and control operations to achieve agency objectives. DHS has defined the role of the Component Acquisition Executive, the senior acquisition official within each component, and established monthly meetings to discuss programs that require management attention. However, DHS has not defined all of the roles and responsibilities of the Office of Program Accountability and Risk Management (PARM)—the lead body responsible for overseeing the acquisition process and assessing the status of acquisition programs—and other headquarters organizations. GAO also found that officials' involvement and relationships with components varied significantly. DHS does not have a structure in place for overseeing the costs of 42 programs in sustainment (that is, programs that have been fielded and are operational) for which acquisition documentation requirements were waived in 2013. Sustainment costs can account for more than 80 percent of total costs, and all but one of these programs lack an approved cost estimate. GAO also previously reported that cost estimates are necessary to support decisions about program funding and resources.

The most recent data that PARM provided to DHS and congressional decision makers for oversight were not consistently accurate and up-to-date. Specifically, PARM's fiscal year 2014 Comprehensive Acquisition Status Report (CASR), which was based on fiscal year 2013 data, contained inaccurate information on DHS acquisition programs. To develop the CASR, PARM drew from DHS's official system for acquisition program reporting, the Next Generation Periodic Reporting System (nPRS); however, the system is hampered by data issues, including inconsistent participation by program officials responsible for entering the data. Further, DHS has not provided useful information for certain CASR reporting requirements. DHS interpreted one requirement in a way that eliminated the need to report cost, schedule, or performance changes for almost half of the programs in the CASR. Holding programs accountable for maintaining their data in nPRS and providing decision makers with more in-depth information would enhance future acquisition reports and render the CASR a more effective instrument for DHS and congressional oversight.

### GAO Assessment of the DHS Comprehensive Acquisition Status Report Development Process

PARM process:



What GAO found:

- Programs are supposed to update data monthly but this was inconsistent.
- Components did not properly validate data.
- The extensive adjudication process did not result in a more accurate CASR.

PARM = DHS Office of Program Accountability and Risk Management  
 nPRS = Next Generation Periodic Reporting System  
 CASR = Comprehensive Acquisition Status Report

Source: GAO analysis of DHS data. | GAO-15-292