

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-17-120](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

In 2015, approximately 2.2 million adolescents aged 12 to 17 were current users of illicit drugs. The Drug-Free Communities Act of 1997 established the DFC Support Program—a federal grant program supporting drug abuse prevention efforts that engage schools, law enforcement, and other sectors of a community. The program targets reductions in the use of alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, and the illicit use of prescription drugs. The Office of National Drug Control Policy Reauthorization Act of 2006 includes a provision that GAO routinely assess ONDCP's programs and operations.

This report addresses: (1) the extent to which ONDCP and SAMHSA use leading practices to coordinate program administration and the types of activities funded; and (2) the extent to which ONDCP's and SAMHSA's operating procedures both ensure DFC grantees comply with governing statutes and provide a basis for performance monitoring. To conduct this work, GAO analyzed agency policies from 2013-2015 (most recent available); interviewed agency officials; and analyzed coordination efforts against relevant key practices GAO identified previously. GAO reviewed files obtained from a non-generalizable random sample of 30 grantees and interviewed a random subset of 10.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that SAMHSA develop an action plan with time frames to strengthen DFC grant monitoring and ensure it sends complete and accurate information to ONDCP. SAMHSA concurred with these recommendations and identified actions to address them.

View [GAO-17-120](#). For more information, contact Diana Maurer at (202) 512-8777 or maurerd@gao.gov

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DRUG-FREE COMMUNITIES SUPPORT PROGRAM

Agencies Have Strengthened Collaboration but Could Enhance Grantee Compliance and Performance Monitoring

What GAO Found

The Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) employ leading collaboration practices to administer the Drug Free Communities (DFC) Support Program and have funded a range of drug prevention activities. Both agencies have improved their collaboration since GAO last reported on the DFC program in 2008. Their current efforts to jointly manage the DFC Support program are consistent with GAO's relevant key collaboration practices. For example, ONDCP and SAMHSA defined and agreed upon common outcomes, such as prioritizing efforts to increase participation from under-represented communities. The two agencies have also funded a range of DFC grantees' activities and report on these activities in their annual evaluation reports. For example, ONDCP reported that from February through July 2014, grantees educated more than 156,000 youth on topics related to the consequences of substance abuse. To illustrate, the 10 grantees GAO interviewed described their specific efforts, including programs for

- **Enhancing Skills:** To enhance the skills of those in the community, one grantee sponsored a session for local realtors on precautions to take when preparing for open houses—warning them that leftover prescriptions in medicine cabinets present the potential for abuse among those walking through the home for sale.
- **Enhancing Access/Reducing Barriers:** To reduce cultural barriers, another grantee developed signs with text in the multiple languages spoken throughout the community that shopkeepers could display to emphasize the legal purchase age for alcohol.
- **Providing Information:** To provide greater information to parents on the consequences of providing alcohol in their homes, a grantee created a slogan to remind parents of their children's needs, "**Be my Parent, not my Bartender.**"

The agencies have operating procedures in place, but could enhance grantee compliance and performance monitoring. In particular, SAMHSA does not consistently follow documentation and reporting procedures to ensure grantees' compliance with governing statutes. SAMHSA also has not been accurately reporting to ONDCP on grantee compliance. Specifically for the files GAO reviewed, SAMHSA followed all processes for ensuring that initial applicants had submitted required documentation before awarding them initial grant funding. However, SAMHSA was less consistent in adhering to procedures for confirming documentation in later years of the program. For example, 14 of the 18 grantees that should have had sustainability plans in their files did not. These plans outline how the grantee intends to maintain necessary resources to achieve long-term goals after exiting the program. Prior to GAO's review, ONDCP and SAMHSA officials were not aware of the missing data in the grant files. Without close adherence to existing procedures, and a mechanism to ensure that the documentation it reports to ONDCP is accurate and complete, SAMHSA's performance monitoring capacity is limited and it cannot be certain that grantees are engaging in intended activities and meeting long-term goals.