



Testimony  
Before the Caucus on International  
Narcotics Control, U.S. Senate

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## DRUG POLICY

# Preliminary Observations on the 2022 National Drug Control Strategy

### Accessible Version

Statement of Triana McNeil, Director, Homeland Security  
and Justice

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# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-22-106087](#), a testimony before the Caucus on International Narcotics Control, U.S. Senate

## Why GAO Did This Study

A record 107,000 Americans died from drug overdoses in 2021. In 2020, GAO determined drug misuse was high risk and subsequently added it to the [2021 High-Risk Series](#) update. We noted the importance of a national drug control strategy to reduce drug overdose deaths. Drug misuse—the use of illicit drugs and the misuse of prescription drugs—has been a persistent and long-standing public health challenge in the U.S. resulting in significant loss of life and a negative effect on society and the economy. These costs are borne by individuals who misuse drugs, as well as their families and employers, private businesses and nonprofit organizations, and federal, state, and local governments. GAO has a body of work on drug policy and ongoing work on ONDCP's efforts, including issuance of the National Drug Control Strategy.

This statement includes preliminary GAO observations on the 2022 National Drug Control Strategy and related findings from selected GAO reports on federal drug control-related efforts. It is based on ongoing GAO work, three reports that GAO issued in [March 2019](#), [December 2019](#) and [March 2020](#), and selected updates on recommendations from these reports as of June 2022. For ongoing work and recommendation updates, GAO assessed the 2022 National Drug Control Strategy against selected statutory requirements, reviewed ONDCP documents, and interviewed ONDCP officials. GAO selected these statutory requirements because they relate to the goals and associated resources expected to be outlined in the 2022 National Drug Control Strategy.

View [GAO-22-106087](#). For more information, contact Triana McNeil at (202) 512-8777 or [McNeilT@gao.gov](mailto:McNeilT@gao.gov)

June 15, 2022

## DRUG POLICY

### Preliminary Observations on the 2022 National Drug Control Strategy

## What GAO Found

Federal drug control efforts span a range of activities including prevention, treatment, interdiction, international operations, and law enforcement. These efforts represent a considerable federal investment. The federal drug control budget for fiscal year 2022 was over \$39 billion and the federal government has enlisted more than a dozen agencies to address drug misuse and its effects.

#### Depiction of Various Narcotics



Source: GAO. | GAO-22-106087

The Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) is responsible for coordinating and overseeing efforts by more than a dozen federal agencies to address illicit drug use. It released six of its eight documents that comprise the 2022 National Drug Control Strategy on April 21, 2022. ONDCP anticipates the remaining two documents to complete the Strategy will be released later this year. GAO's preliminary review of the available Strategy documents against selected statutory requirements shows that ONDCP included certain information as required by law. For example, it included annual quantifiable and measurable objectives and specific targets to accomplish long-term quantifiable goals. However, GAO was unable to identify whether the Strategy addressed statutorily required information on performance evaluation planning, estimates of resources needed to achieve goals, and a systematic plan for increasing data collection. This is, in part, because the Strategy refers to this information in documents that are not yet available. ONDCP may include this information in accompanying National Drug Control Strategy documents it plans to release later this year.

Chairman Whitehouse, Co-Chairman Grassley, and Members of the Caucus:

I am pleased to be here today to discuss our ongoing work related to the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) and its recently released 2022 National Drug Control Strategy. The Strategy is to set forth a comprehensive plan to reduce illicit drug use and the consequences of such illicit drug use in the United States by limiting the availability of and reducing the demand for illegal drugs and promoting prevention, early intervention, treatment, and recovery support for individuals with substance use disorders.<sup>1</sup>

A record 107,000 people in the United States died from drug overdoses in 2021, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).<sup>2</sup> Opioids—particularly highly potent synthetic opioids like fentanyl—are currently the main contributor of these deaths.<sup>3</sup> The Council of Economic Advisers estimated that, in 2018, the economic cost of the opioid crisis alone was more than \$700 billion when considering the value of lives lost due to opioid-related overdoses.<sup>4</sup> Drug misuse—the use of illicit drugs and the misuse of prescription drugs—has been a persistent and long-standing public health challenge in the U.S. resulting in significant loss of life and a negative effect on society and the economy. These costs are borne by individuals who misuse drugs, as well as their

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<sup>1</sup>21 U.S.C. § 1705(b)(1).

<sup>2</sup>The CDC's National Center for Health Statistics provisional counts are adjusted to account for reporting delays. Provisional data are underreported, due to incomplete data. These data represent the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's predicted number of overdose deaths.

<sup>3</sup>There were more deaths in 2019 involving synthetic opioids than from any other type of opioid, according to the CDC. Synthetic opioids are highly potent drugs manufactured to mimic naturally occurring opioids such as morphine. See *GAO, Illicit Opioids: While Greater Attention Given to Combating Synthetic Opioids, Agencies Need to Better Assess their Efforts*, [GAO-18-205](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 29, 2018).

<sup>4</sup>The Council of Economic Advisers, *The Underestimated Cost of the Opioid Crisis*, (Washington, D.C.: November 2017).

families and employers, private businesses and nonprofit organizations, and federal, state, and local governments.

In March 2019, we named drug misuse as an emerging issue requiring close attention.<sup>5</sup> In March 2020, we determined that national efforts to prevent, respond to, and recover from drug misuse was high risk.<sup>6</sup> Primarily due to increasing rates of opioid-related deaths and opioid use disorder, the Acting Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) declared the opioid crisis an ongoing public health emergency on October 26, 2017.<sup>7</sup> As a result of the continued consequences of the opioid crisis affecting our nation, the public health emergency was last renewed on April 1, 2022. We highlight these issues in our latest High-Risk report, which we issued on March 2, 2021. In that report, we added national efforts to prevent, respond to, and recover from drug misuse to the High-Risk List.<sup>8</sup>

Federal drug control efforts span a range of activities including prevention, treatment, interdiction, international operations, and law enforcement. These efforts represent a considerable federal investment. The federal drug control budget for fiscal year 2022 was over \$39 billion

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<sup>5</sup>GAO, *High-Risk Series: Substantial Efforts Needed to Achieve Greater Progress on High-Risk Areas*, [GAO-19-157SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 6, 2019).

<sup>6</sup>GAO, *Drug Misuse: Sustained National Efforts Are Necessary for Prevention, Response, and Recovery*, [GAO-20-474](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 26, 2020). GAO waited to include drug misuse in the 2021 High-Risk Series update and make the high-risk designation effective at that time due to the severe public health and economic effects of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. In addition, many of the federal agencies responsible for addressing drug misuse would be focused on addressing the pandemic.

<sup>7</sup>A public health emergency triggers the availability of certain authorities under federal law that enable federal agencies to take certain actions in response. In September 2018, we reported that the federal government had used three available authorities since declaring the public health emergency to: (1) quickly survey more than 13,000 providers to assess prescribing trends for a medication used to treat opioid use disorder and any barriers to prescribing it, (2) waive the public notice period for approval of two state Medicaid demonstration projects related to substance use disorder treatment, and (3) expedite research funding on medication development for opioid use disorder and overdoses. See *GAO, Opioid Crisis: Status of Public Health Emergency Authorities*, [GAO-18-685R](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sep. 26, 2018).

<sup>8</sup>Every two years at the start of a new Congress, GAO calls attention to agencies and program areas that are high risk due to their vulnerabilities to fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement, or are most in need of transformation. See *GAO, HIGH-RISK SERIES: Dedicated Leadership Needed to Address Limited Progress in Most High-Risk Areas*, [GAO-21-119SP](#). (Washington, D.C.: March 2, 2021).

and the federal government has enlisted more than a dozen agencies to address drug misuse and its effects. ONDCP is responsible for overseeing and coordinating the implementation of U.S. drug control policy, including the National Drug Control Strategy.<sup>9</sup> These responsibilities include the Director of ONDCP promulgating a National Drug Control Strategy, and assessing and certifying the adequacy of the National Drug Control Program agencies' budget submissions.<sup>10</sup> These agencies submit to ONDCP the portion of their budget requests dedicated to drug control, which they prepare as part of their overall budget submission for the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). ONDCP described the aims of the 2022 National Drug Control Strategy to include reducing the number of drug overdose deaths, putting quality public health services within reach of people with substance abuse disorders, and stopping drug trafficking organizations that seek profits by harming Americans.

In my testimony today, I will discuss our preliminary observations on whether the contents of the 2022 National Drug Control Strategy and companion documents address certain statutory requirements under 21 U.S.C. § 1705. The observations discussed are based on our review of the Strategy and accompanying documents released by ONDCP on April 21, 2022. We will also describe how our preliminary observations of the 2022 National Drug Control Strategy relate to findings and recommendations from our prior work.

To develop our preliminary observations, we obtained and analyzed the 2022 National Drug Control Strategy and available accompanying documents, assessed them against selected requirements of 21 U.S.C. § 1705, and interviewed ONDCP officials. We selected these statutory requirements because they relate to the goals and associated resources expected to be outlined in the 2022 National Drug Control Strategy. In our ongoing review we will assess the complete strategy against all the statutory requirements. To perform our prior work, we similarly reviewed and analyzed documents from ONDCP and other relevant federal agencies, reviewed statutory requirements, and interviewed relevant agency officials. More detailed information on the scope and methodologies used to conduct our prior work related to the National Drug Control Strategy can be found in each product cited in this

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<sup>9</sup>21 U.S.C. § 1702(a)(2).

<sup>10</sup>21 U.S.C. § 1703(b)(2) and (c)(3).

statement.<sup>11</sup> This statement also includes selected updates related to recommendations we have made in those issued products. To conduct these updates, we reviewed documentation provided by ONDCP officials through October 2021 about steps they have taken to address recommendations since the publication of each respective product.

We conducted the work on which this statement is based in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

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## Background

More than a dozen federal agencies—known as National Drug Control Program agencies—have responsibilities for drug prevention, treatment, and law enforcement activities.<sup>12</sup> For example, HHS has led efforts to expand access to drug treatment, and the Departments of Justice (DOJ) and Homeland Security (DHS) have taken lead roles in limiting the availability of illicit drugs through criminal investigations and prosecutions. The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988 established ONDCP to enhance

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<sup>11</sup>GAO, Drug Control: The Office of National Drug Control Policy Should Develop Key Planning Elements to Meet Statutory Requirements, [GAO-20-124](#) (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 18, 2019); Drug Misuse: Sustained National Efforts are Necessary for Prevention, Response, and Recovery [GAO-20-474](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 26, 2020); and Drug Policy: Preliminary Observations on the 2019 National Drug Control Strategy, [GAO-19-370T](#). (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 7, 2019).

<sup>12</sup>Under 21 U.S.C. § 1701(11), “[t]he term ‘National Drug Control Program Agency’ means any agency (or bureau, office, independent agency, board, division, commission, subdivision, unit, or other component thereof) that is responsible for implementing any aspect of the National Drug Control Strategy, including any agency that receives Federal funds to implement any aspect of the National Drug Control Strategy, but does not include any agency that receives funds for drug control activity solely under the National Intelligence Program or the Joint Military Intelligence Program.” In addition to ONDCP, these agencies include the departments of Agriculture, Defense, Education, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Housing and Urban Development, Interior, Justice, Labor, State, Transportation, Treasury, and Veterans Affairs, as well as the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency for the District of Columbia, the Federal Judiciary, the United States Postal Inspection Service, and AMERICORPS.

national drug control planning and coordination.<sup>13</sup> In this role, the office is responsible for (1) leading the national drug control effort, (2) coordinating and overseeing the implementation of national drug control policy, (3) assessing and certifying the adequacy of National Drug Control Programs and the budget for those programs, and (4) evaluating the effectiveness of national drug control policy efforts.<sup>14</sup>

In October 2018, the Substance Use-Disorder Prevention that Promotes Opioid Recovery and Treatment for Patients and Communities Act (SUPPORT Act) was enacted and reauthorized ONDCP and a number of its programs.<sup>15</sup> The SUPPORT Act aims to address overprescribing and opioid misuse in the United States and includes provisions involving law enforcement, public health, and healthcare financing and coverage. The National Drug Control Strategy is to set forth a comprehensive plan to reduce illicit drug use and the consequences of such drug use in the United States by limiting the availability of and reducing the demand for illegal drugs.<sup>16</sup>

The Director of ONDCP is required to promulgate the National Drug Control Strategy and work with National Drug Control Program agencies to develop an annual National Drug Control Program Budget.<sup>17</sup> Pursuant to 21 U.S.C. § 1705(a), the Director is required to release a statement of drug control policy priorities in the calendar year of a Presidential inauguration following the inauguration, no later than April 1st. The Director is also to promulgate the National Drug Control Strategy which the President is to submit to Congress not later than the first Monday in February following the year in which the term of the President commences, and every 2 years thereafter.<sup>18</sup>

We have reviewed multiple iterations of the National Drug Control Strategy to understand whether ONDCP met selected statutory requirements. ONDCP did not issue a National Drug Control Strategy for

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<sup>13</sup>Pub. L. No. 100-690, 102 Stat. 4181.

<sup>14</sup>21 U.S.C. § 1702(a)(1)-(4).

<sup>15</sup>Pub. L. No. 115-271, 132 Stat. 3894 (October 24, 2018).

<sup>16</sup>21 U.S.C. § 1705(b).

<sup>17</sup>21 U.S.C. § 1703(b)(2) and (c)(2).

<sup>18</sup>21 U.S.C. § 1705(a)(2).

2017 or 2018 despite the statutory requirement. ONDCP issued a 2019 Strategy and companion documents that addressed some but not all of the selected statutory requirements we reviewed.<sup>19</sup> ONDCP issued the 2020 Strategy in February 2020. While we found that the 2020 Strategy made progress in addressing several statutory requirements, it fell short on several other requirements. For example, it contained annual quantifiable and measurable objectives and specific targets that the 2019 Strategy had not; however, it did not include a list of each National Drug Control Program agencies' activities and the role of each activity in achieving the Strategy's long-range goals, as required by law.<sup>20</sup> The 2020 Strategy also did not include the required 5-year projection for the National Drug Control Program and budget priorities<sup>21</sup> or estimates of federal funding needed to achieve each of the Strategy's long-range quantifiable goals.<sup>22</sup>

As a result of our findings, some of which are mentioned above, we made a number of recommendations related to the National Drug Control Strategy. In December 2019, we recommended that ONDCP develop and document key planning elements to help structure its ongoing efforts and to better position it to meet these requirements for future iterations of the National Drug Control Strategy. In June 2021, ONDCP officials provided several internal guidance documents with key planning elements to help ONDCP meet the SUPPORT Act requirements, thereby addressing our recommendation. In our December 2019 report, we also recommended that ONDCP routinely implement an approach, based on the planning elements to meet the requirements for the 2020 National Drug Control Strategy and future Strategy iterations. In order to address this recommendation, ONDCP will need to use this internal guidance to develop future iterations of the National Drug Control Strategy. Our ongoing review of the 2022 Strategy will enable us to determine if ONDCP has addressed this recommendation.

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<sup>19</sup>GAO, *Drug Control: The Office of National Drug Control Policy Should Develop Key Planning Elements to Meet Statutory Requirements*, [GAO-20-124](#) (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 18, 2019).

<sup>20</sup> 21 U.S.C. § 1705(c)(1)(F)(i).

<sup>21</sup> 21 U.S.C. § 1705(c)(1)(D).

<sup>22</sup> 21 U.S.C. § 1705(c)(1)(F)(iii).



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## Preliminary Observations on Whether the 2022 National Drug Control Strategy Addresses Selected Statutory Requirements

As mentioned, pursuant to 21 U.S.C. § 1705(a), the Director is required to release a statement of drug control policy priorities in the calendar year of a Presidential inauguration following the inauguration, but not later than April 1, and promulgate the National Drug Control Strategy which the President is to submit to Congress not later than the first Monday in February following the year in which the term of the President commences, and every 2 years thereafter. In January 2022, ONDCP notified Congress that it would not complete the 2022 National Drug Control Strategy by the statutory deadline (February 7, 2022) and it planned to submit the Strategy to the committees no later than June 30, 2022.<sup>23</sup> On April 21, 2022, ONDCP issued the 2022 National Drug Control Strategy and the following accompanying documents:

- 2022 National Drug Control Strategy,
- Performance Review System Report,
- National Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy,
- National Northern Border Counternarcotics Strategy,
- Caribbean Border Counternarcotics Strategy, and
- National Interdiction Command and Control Plan<sup>24</sup>

ONDCP has not yet issued the following two key National Drug Control Strategy accompanying documents:

- Fiscal Year 2023 Budget Summary and,
- National Drug Control Assessment.

We were only able to review the six available documents and, therefore, were unable to conduct a complete assessment of the Strategy and its

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<sup>23</sup> Pursuant to 21 U.S.C. § 1705(e), if the Director of ONDCP does not submit a National Drug Control Strategy to Congress in accordance with the statutory timing, not later than five days after the first Monday in February following the year in which the term of the President commences, the Director shall send a notification to the appropriate congressional committees explaining why the Strategy was not submitted; and specify the date by which the Strategy will be submitted.

<sup>24</sup> ONDCP released the National Interdiction Command and Control Plan in August 2021.

companion documents. As of June 10, 2022, ONDCP has not issued the Fiscal Year 2023 Budget Summary and National Drug Control Assessment. ONDCP officials stated that they plan to issue the Budget Summary and the National Drug Control Assessment by the end of July 2022. According to ONDCP, the Budget Summary is to ensure that each National Drug Control Program agency's goals and budgets support and are fully consistent with the Strategy. The Budget Summary is to identify the major programs and activities of the National Drug Control Program agencies that support the goals and objectives of the Strategy. In addition, the Budget Summary is to include the related programs, activities, and available assets, and discuss the role of each program, activity, and asset in achieving the Strategy's goals. The Budget Summary is also to provide an estimate of federal funding and other resources needed. ONDCP describes the National Drug Control Assessment as a summary of the progress of each National Drug Control Program agency's efforts towards meeting the Strategy's goals. The Assessment also is to establish each agency's specific performance measures and include an evaluation of the progress toward meeting the annual targets of those performance measures.

In conducting our preliminary analysis on whether the 2022 National Drug Control Strategy and the accompanying documents addressed selected statutory requirements, we reviewed all of the available documents against selected requirements of 21 U.S.C. § 1705, and interviewed ONDCP officials. These statutory requirements provide illustrative examples of the types of information required by law to be included in the National Drug Control Strategy. Our preliminary analysis shows that the current National Drug Control Strategy addresses the following statutory requirements:

- **Comprehensive, long-range, quantifiable goals.** By law, the National Drug Control Strategy is required to include “[c]omprehensive, research-based, long-range, quantifiable goals for reducing illicit drug use, and the consequences of illicit drug use in the United States.”<sup>25</sup> The 2022 National Drug Control Strategy outlines seven specific strategic goals and objectives for the Nation to reduce the demand for and availability of illicit drugs and their consequences. Each goal is supplemented by objectives that include targets to reach by 2025. These goals represent the comprehensive, research-based,

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<sup>25</sup> 21 U.S.C. § 1705(c)(1)(B).

long-range, quantifiable goals for reducing illicit drug use, and the consequences of illicit drug use in the United States, as required.

- **Specific targets to accomplish long-term quantifiable goals.** By law, the Strategy is required to include “[a]nnual quantifiable and measurable objectives and specific targets to accomplish long-term quantifiable goals that the Director determines may be achieved during each year beginning on the date on which the National Drug Control Strategy is submitted.”<sup>26</sup> In the Performance Review System Report (PRS), ONDCP provides additional details on the goals and objectives discussed in the National Drug Control Strategy. The Performance Review System Report outlines specific annual targets for each of the objectives outlined in the National Drug Control Strategy. We found that in the majority of the cases, ONDCP has established annual targets for each of the goals and objectives for fiscal years 2021 through 2025.

We also identified statutory requirements that ONDCP does not address in the available National Drug Control Strategy and accompanying documents that were issued in April 2022. Based on the Strategy documents we reviewed, ONDCP may meet the following statutory requirements in forthcoming publications:<sup>27</sup>

- **Performance evaluation plan for each established goal.** By law, the Strategy is required to include “[f]or each year covered by the Strategy, a performance evaluation plan for each goal established [as part of the Strategy] for each National Drug Control Program agency.”<sup>28</sup> From our preliminary review of the Strategy and companion documents, we did not identify such a performance evaluation plan for National Drug Control Program agencies. However, the PRS states that, “[t]he PRS focuses on the overall progress toward achieving the goals and objectives of the Strategy; it is complemented by the [National Drug Control] Assessment, which is a summary of the progress of each National Drug Control Program agency’s (NDCPA) efforts towards meeting the Strategy’s goals. The Assessment establishes each NDCPA’s specific performance measures and includes an evaluation of the progress of meeting the annual targets

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<sup>26</sup>21 U.S.C. § 1705(c)(1)(C).

<sup>27</sup>These include the Fiscal Year 2023 Budget Summary and the National Drug Control Assessment, among other documents.

<sup>28</sup>21 U.S.C. § 1705(c)(1)(G).

of those performance measures.” As of June 10, 2022, ONDCP has not released the National Drug Control Assessment.

- **Estimate of resources needed to achieve goals.** By law, the Strategy is required to include “[a] description of how each goal established [as part of the Strategy] will be achieved.”<sup>29</sup> As part of this description, the Strategy is required to have for each goal, “an estimate of Federal funding and other resources needed to achieve such goal.”<sup>30</sup> We found that while the National Drug Control Strategy outlines goals, it does not provide an estimate of the federal funding or other resources needed to achieve these goals. Based on the PRS, the forthcoming Budget Summary may provide information on the nature of federal funding and other resources needed to achieve National Drug Control Strategy goals.
- **National Drug Control Program and budget priorities.** By law, the Strategy is required to include “[a] 5-year projection for the National Drug Control Program and budget priorities.”<sup>31</sup> From our preliminary review, we did not identify a 5-year projection pursuant to statutory requirement. According to the PRS, “the Budget Summary ensures that each agency’s goals and budgets support and are fully consistent with the Strategy. As previously mentioned, ONDCP has not yet released the Budget Summary.
- **A systematic plan for increasing data collection.** By law, the Strategy is required to include “[a] systematic plan for increasing data collection to enable real time surveillance of drug control threats, developing analysis and monitoring capabilities, and identifying and addressing policy questions related to the National Drug Control Strategy and Program.”<sup>32</sup> As of June 10, 2022, ONDCP has not yet created a systematic plan for increasing data collection.<sup>33</sup> ONDCP included information in the National Drug Control Strategy on the development of a systematic data plan. ONDCP officials stated that it may take approximately 1 year to fully develop the plan, depending on the availability of staff and funding resources.

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<sup>29</sup> 21 U.S.C. § 1705(c)(1)(F).

<sup>30</sup> 21 U.S.C. § 1705(c)(1)(F)(iii).

<sup>31</sup> 21 U.S.C. § 1705(c)(1)(D).

<sup>32</sup> 21 U.S.C. § 1705(c)(1)(M).

<sup>33</sup> 21 U.S.C. § 1705(c)(1)(M).

- **Description of resources needed to implement border counternarcotics strategies.** As part of the National Drug Control Strategy, the Director of ONDCP is required to include a Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy and a Northern Border Counternarcotics Strategy.<sup>34</sup> These additional strategies were issued in April 2022. However, as part of the Southwest Border and Northern Border Counternarcotics Strategies, the strategies are required to “identify the specific resources required to enable the relevant National Drug Control Program agencies to implement th[ese] strategies.”<sup>35</sup> From our preliminary review of the Southwest Border and Northern Border Counternarcotics Strategies, we did not identify the information required. Our review of available documentation did not identify any forthcoming documentation, which would meet this statutory requirement.

In summary, ONDCP’s responsibility to develop the National Drug Control Strategy offers an important opportunity to help prioritize, coordinate, and measure key efforts to address the drug crisis. Our work has shown that ONDCP can improve its efforts to develop a National Drug Control Strategy that meets statutory requirements and effectively coordinates national efforts to address drug misuse. In 2017 and 2018, ONDCP did not issue a statutorily required National Drug Control Strategy, and we reported that the 2019 National Drug Control Strategy did not fully comply with the law.<sup>36</sup> In December 2019, we recommended that ONDCP develop and document key planning elements to help structure its ongoing efforts and to better position ONDCP to meet these requirements for future iterations of the National Drug Control Strategy.<sup>37</sup> In 2020, we reviewed the 2020 National Drug Control Strategy and reported that ONDCP had made progress in addressing several statutory requirements but fell short in meeting other requirements.<sup>38</sup> Our preliminary work on the 2022 National Drug Control Strategy has identified a number of statutory requirements that ONDCP has addressed, as well as several areas where we did not identify the statutorily required information. As part of

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<sup>34</sup> 21 U.S.C. § 1705(c)(3)(A)-(C).

<sup>35</sup> 21 U.S.C. § 1705(c)(3)(B)(i)(III) and (C)(i)(III).

<sup>36</sup> GAO, *Drug Control: The Office of National Drug Control Policy Should Develop Key Planning Elements to Meet Statutory Requirements*, [GAO-20-124](#) (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 18, 2019).

<sup>37</sup> [GAO-20-124](#) (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 18, 2019).

<sup>38</sup> GAO, *Drug Misuse: Sustained National Efforts Are Necessary for Prevention, Response, and Recovery*, [GAO-20-474](#) (Washington, DC.: Mar 26, 2020).

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our ongoing work, we will share any issues or concerns regarding the 2022 National Drug Control Strategy with ONDCP officials and examine how ONDCP intends to address the remaining statutory requirements. Once published by ONDCP, we will also examine the National Drug Control Assessment and Budget Summary to assess whether these documents include the statutorily required information that we did not identify in the Strategy documents ONDCP has issued to date.

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Chairman Whitehouse, Co-Chairman Grassley, and Members of the Caucus, this concludes our prepared statement. I would be happy to respond to any questions you may have at this time.

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## GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

If you or your staff has any questions concerning this testimony, please contact Triana McNeil at (202) 512-8777 ([McNeilT@gao.gov](mailto:McNeilT@gao.gov)). Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this statement. In addition to the contacts named above, Frederick Lyles, Jr. (Assistant Director), Taylor Hadfield (Analyst in Charge), Billy Commons, Benjamin Crossley, Susan Hsu, Daniel Kuhn, Amanda Miller, Jan Montgomery, Shivani Singh, and Adam Vogt made key contributions to the testimony. Other staff who made key contributions to the reports cited in the testimony are identified in the source products.

## Related GAO Products

*DRUG CONTROL GRANTS: ONDCP Should Document Its Process for Identifying Duplication, Overlap, and Fragmentation.* [GAO-22-104666](#). Washington, D.C.: December 8, 2021.

*HIGH-RISK SERIES: Dedicated Leadership Needed to Address Limited Progress in Most High-Risk Areas.* [GAO-21-119SP](#). Washington, D.C.: March 2, 2021.

*Substance Use Disorder: Reliable Data Needed for Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant Program.* [GAO-21-58](#). Washington, D.C.: December 14, 2020.

*Drug Misuse: Agencies Have Not Fully Identified How Grants That Can Support Drug Prevention Education Programs Contribute to National Goals.* [GAO-21-96](#). Washington, D.C.: November 18, 2020.

*Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs: Views on Usefulness and Challenges of Programs.* [GAO-21-22](#). Washington, D.C.: October 1, 2020.

*Bureau of Prisons: Improved Planning Would Help BOP Evaluate and Manage Its Portfolio of Drug Education and Treatment Programs.* [GAO-20-423](#). Washington, D.C.: May 26, 2020.

*Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act: Additional DOL Actions Needed to Help States and Employers Address Substance Use Disorder.* [GAO-20-337](#). Washington, D.C.: May 21, 2020.

*Drug Misuse: Sustained National Efforts Are Necessary for Prevention, Response, and Recovery.* [GAO-20-474](#). Washington, D.C.: March 26, 2020.

*Drug Control: Actions Needed to Ensure Usefulness of Data on Suspicious Opioid Orders.* [GAO-20-118](#). Washington, D.C.: January 29, 2020.

*Opioid Use Disorder: Barriers to Medicaid Beneficiaries' Access to Treatment Medications.* [GAO-20-233](#). Washington, D.C.: January 24, 2020.

*Drug Control: The Office of National Drug Control Policy Should Develop Key Planning Elements to Meet Statutory Requirements.* [GAO-20-124](#). Washington, D.C.: December 18, 2019.

*Veterans Health Care: Services for Substance Use Disorders, and Efforts to Address Access Issues in Rural Areas.* [GAO-20-35](#). Washington, D.C.: December 2, 2019.

*Drug Policy: Preliminary Observations on the 2019 National Drug Control Strategy.* [GAO-19-370T](#). Washington, D.C.: March 7, 2019.

*Drug Control: DOD Should Improve Its Oversight of the National Guard Counterdrug Program.* [GAO-19-27](#). Washington, D.C.: January 17, 2019.

*Colombia: U.S. Counternarcotics Assistance Achieved Some Positive Results but State Needs to Review the Overall U.S. Approach.* [GAO-19-106](#). Washington, D.C.: December 12, 2018.

*Opioid Crisis: Status of Public Health Emergency Authorities.* [GAO-18-685R](#). Washington, D.C.: September 26, 2018.

*Prescription Opioids: Medicare Needs Better Information to Reduce the Risk of Harm to Beneficiaries.* [GAO-18-585T](#). Washington, D.C.: May 29, 2018.

*VA Health Care: Progress Made Towards Improving Opioid Safety, but Further Efforts to Assess Progress and Reduce Risk Are Needed.* [GAO-18-380](#). Washington, D.C.: May 29, 2018.

*Illicit Opioids: Office of National Drug Control Policy and Other Agencies Need to Better Assess Strategic Efforts.* [GAO-18-569T](#). Washington, D.C.: May 17, 2018.

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