

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-17-766T](#), a testimony before the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, in 2015, the most recent year for which national data are available, over 52,000 Americans died from drug overdoses, or approximately 144 people every day. Policymakers, criminal justice officials, health care providers, and the public at large are turning with renewed attention to the drug epidemic and its impact on our nation. To help reduce illicit drug use and its consequences, ONDCP oversees and coordinates the implementation of national drug control policy across the federal government.

This statement addresses: (1) the federal government's progress in achieving Strategy goals, (2) results from a Comptroller General's Forum on preventing illicit drug use, and (3) the findings of GAO's recent review of ONDCP's DFC Support program.

This statement is based on GAO's prior work issued from May 2016 through February 2017, with selected status updates as of July 2017, and updates from ONDCP's National Drug Control Budget Funding Highlight reports issued from fiscal year 2016 to fiscal year 2018. For the updates, GAO used publicly available data sources that ONDCP uses to assess its progress on Strategy goals, and interviewed ONDCP officials.

View [GAO-17-766T](#). For more information, contact Diana Maurer at (202) 512-8777 or maurerd@gao.gov.

July 26, 2017

DRUG CONTROL POLICY

Information on Status of Federal Efforts and Key Issues for Preventing Illicit Drug Use

What GAO Found

The federal government has made mixed progress toward achieving the goals articulated in the 2010 National Drug Control Strategy (Strategy). In the Strategy, the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) established seven goals related to reducing illicit drug use and its consequences by 2015. In many instances, the data used to assess progress in 2015 have only recently become available. GAO's review of this updated data indicates that, as of July 2017, the federal government made moderate progress toward achieving two goals, limited progress on two goals, and no progress on the other three goals. However, none of the overall goals in the Strategy were fully achieved. For example, progress had not been made on the goal to reduce drug-induced deaths by 15 percent. Drug-induced deaths instead increased from 2009 to 2015 by 41.5 percent. Although progress was made reducing the 30-day prevalence of drug use among 12- to 17-year-olds from the 10.1 percent reported in 2009, the goal of reducing prevalence to 8.6 percent by 2015 was not achieved. According to ONDCP, as of July 2017, work is currently underway to develop a new strategy.

In June 2016, GAO convened a diverse panel of experts, including from ONDCP to advance the national dialogue on preventing illicit drug use. The panel focused on (1) common factors related to illicit drug use; (2) strategies in the education, health care, and law enforcement sectors to prevent illicit drug use; and (3) high priority areas for future action to prevent illicit drug use. According to forum participants, illicit drug use typically occurs for the first time in adolescence, involves marijuana, and increasingly, legal prescriptions for opioid-based pain relievers. Forum participants also discussed strategies available in the education, health care, and law enforcement sectors for preventing illicit drug use. For example, forum participants championed the use of school- or community-based prevention programs that research has shown to be successful in preventing illicit drug use and other behaviors. They also identified several high priority areas for future actions to prevent illicit drug use, including: supporting community coalitions, consolidating federal funding streams for prevention programs, and reducing the number of opioid prescriptions.

In February 2017, GAO issued a report on the Drug-Free Communities Support Program (DFC)—a program that ONDCP and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) jointly manage. This program aims to support drug abuse prevention efforts that engage schools, law enforcement, and other sectors of a community to target reductions in the use of alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, and the illicit use of prescription drugs. GAO reported that ONDCP and SAMHSA had strengthened their joint management of the program by employing leading collaboration practices; however, the agencies could enhance DFC grantee compliance and performance monitoring. For example, SAMHSA did not consistently confirm grantees had completed plans to achieve long-term goals after exiting the program. GAO recommended that SAMHSA develop an action plan to strengthen DFC grant monitoring and ensure it sends complete and accurate information to ONDCP. SAMHSA concurred with GAO's recommendations and reported in April 2017 that its actions to address them should be completed by this fall.