

## Why GAO Did This Study

PAIMI grant awards, established by Congress in 1986 and totaling \$36 million in 2016, are administered by SAMHSA to support state protection and advocacy programs. PAIMI programs protect and advocate for the rights of individuals with significant mental illness by investigating reports of incidents of abuse and neglect of such individuals in facilities such as hospitals, and in the community, among other activities.

The 21st Century Cures Act included a provision for GAO to review the PAIMI programs and their compliance with federal statutory and regulatory requirements. This report examines (1) the outcomes reported by PAIMI programs in selected states, and (2) SAMHSA's oversight of state PAIMI programs, including their compliance with federal requirements. GAO reviewed FY 2015 and 2016 PAIMI program documentation for eight of 57 programs selected for variation in funding amount, geographic location, and other factors. GAO also reviewed relevant SAMHSA policies and procedures and assessed them against federal standards for internal control.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that SAMHSA take steps to ensure that changes to performance benchmarks are examined over time, and to ensure onsite reviews are completed—and findings are provided to state programs—in a timely manner. The Department of Health and Human Services concurred with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-18-450](#). For more information, contact Katherine Iritani at (202) 512-7114 or [iritanik@gao.gov](mailto:iritanik@gao.gov).

## MENTAL HEALTH

### Federal Procedures to Oversee Protection and Advocacy Programs Could Be Further Improved

## What GAO Found

The eight selected state Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness (PAIMI) programs GAO reviewed reported a range of positive outcomes from their work on behalf of individuals with mental illness. For example, in fiscal year (FY) 2016, the selected programs reported resolving in the individual's favor 1,772 out of 2,390 cases (74 percent) related to complaints of alleged abuse, neglect, and rights violations. The remaining cases were reported as withdrawn by the client, closed due to lack of merit, or not resolved in the individual's favor. These programs also reported concluding a variety of broader, system-level activities—referred to as systemic activities—intended to benefit groups of individuals with mental illness. These systemic activities resulted in, for example, changes to procedures in mental health institutions and correctional facilities.

**Selected Outcomes Reported by Eight Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness Programs, Fiscal Year 2016**

Type of activity	Outcome
<b>Individual cases</b>	<b>Closed in favor of individual</b>
Rights violations	1,122
Neglect	341
Abuse	309
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,772</b>
<b>Systemic activities</b>	<b>Concluded successfully</b>
Facility monitoring	263
Investigations	46
Group advocacy (non-litigation)	29
Other	29
<b>Total</b>	<b>367</b>

Source: GAO analysis of 2016 Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration data. | GAO-18-450

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), which oversees the state PAIMI programs, has a variety of procedures in place to monitor performance and compliance. However, two areas warrant additional attention, as follows:

- SAMHSA has not consistently examined changes to performance benchmarks—the goals, objectives, and targets that PAIMI programs set annually for their planned work. Programs are permitted to modify these benchmarks, and GAO found that four had done so. A new SAMHSA system implemented in 2017 could improve recording of benchmark changes, but SAMHSA lacks procedures to examine changes across years, which could help identify performance concerns.
- SAMHSA often failed to complete its periodic, in-depth reviews of programs and to provide findings of identified deficiencies to PAIMI programs on a timely basis. SAMHSA has plans to improve the efficiency of its review process. However, it is unclear the extent to which these plans will resolve the timeliness issues, which could delay resolution of any issues found in the reviews.