Why GAO Did This Study

Drug deaths in the United States have been rising for years. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in 2017 there were over 70,000 U.S. drug overdose deaths. This national emergency results in part from the activities of international narcotics traffickers and their organizations. The Kingpin Act, enacted in 1999, allows Treasury to designate and sanction individuals and entities that contribute to illicit narcotics trafficking. Sanctions and other consequences include blocking a designee’s property and assets, denying U.S. travel visas to designees, and penalizing U.S. persons who violate the prohibitions in the Kingpin Act. Treasury is required to submit an annual report to Congress on agencies’ Kingpin Act–related personnel and resource expenditures and sanctions activities.

This report examines (1) how U.S. agencies designate individuals and entities under the Kingpin Act; (2) the extent to which U.S. agencies monitor, enforce, and report on sanctions under the Kingpin Act; and (3) what agencies have done to assess the effectiveness of the Kingpin Act. GAO reviewed documents from and interviewed officials at Treasury, the Department of State, and other partner agencies. GAO also performed fieldwork in Colombia and Mexico.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that Treasury ensure that OFAC (1) improve guidance to partner agencies on their Kingpin Act–related expenditures and (2) disclose expenditure data limitations in its annual Kingpin Act reports to Congress. Treasury did not agree or disagree with the recommendations.

View GAO-20-112. For more information, contact Chelsa Kenney Gurkin at (202) 512-2964 or GurkinC@gao.gov.