

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-25-107667](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

DHS is responsible for securing the nation's borders against the trafficking of drugs. This includes illicit fentanyl, which continues to be the primary cause of overdose deaths in the U.S. The James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2023 requires DHS to, among other things, establish a program to collect data and develop measures to assess the effectiveness of efforts to detect and deter illicit fentanyl, including its analogues and precursor chemicals, from being trafficked into the U.S. The Act includes a provision for GAO to review the data collected and measures developed by DHS's program.

This report examines (1) DHS data on seizures of illicit fentanyl, its precursor chemicals, and production equipment from FY 2021 through 2024; (2) DHS efforts to combat the trafficking of these items into the U.S.; and (3) the extent DHS has assessed the effectiveness of its efforts. GAO analyzed DHS, CBP, and HSI documents and data on fentanyl-related seizures and investigations for FY 2021 through 2024. GAO also interviewed DHS, CBP, and HSI officials, including CBP and HSI field officials during visits to four locations.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DHS (1) establish a statutorily required program to collect data and develop measures to assess efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking into the U.S., (2) ensure the entity it tasks with establishing the program has access to needed information, and (3) develop performance goals and measures for its strategic goals. DHS concurred with the recommendations.

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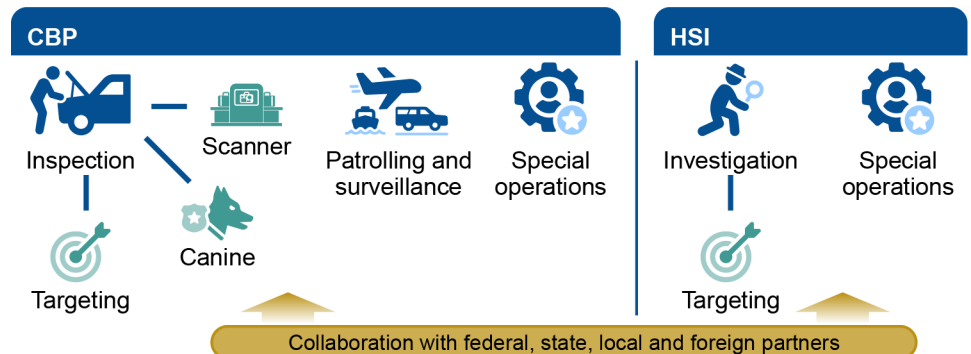
ILLICIT FENTANYL

DHS Has Various Efforts to Combat Trafficking but Could Better Assess Effectiveness

What GAO Found

Department of Homeland Security (DHS) components—primarily U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations (HSI)—led or assisted on the seizure of almost 460,000 pounds of fentanyl and chemicals used to make fentanyl (precursors) and 10,000 pieces of equipment used to make fentanyl pills (production equipment) from fiscal years (FY) 2021 through 2024. DHS conducts various efforts to combat the trafficking of fentanyl, its precursor chemicals, and production equipment into the U.S. through CBP and HSI. Specifically, CBP inspects incoming travelers and shipments and patrols and surveils the border; and HSI investigates bad actors and transnational criminal organizations. CBP and HSI also conduct special operations to disrupt fentanyl-related supply chains and collaborate with federal, state, local, and foreign law enforcement partners.

Department of Homeland Security Component Efforts and Tools to Combat Fentanyl Trafficking



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) information; Icons-Studio/stock.adobe.com; ylivdesign/stock.adobe.com (scanner icon). | GAO-25-107667

DHS analyzes and reports data on its efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking, but its ability to fully assess the effectiveness of its efforts is limited. This is because it has not established a statutorily required program and incorporated key performance management practices. Specifically, DHS has not established a program to collect data and develop measures to assess the effectiveness of efforts to combat the trafficking of illicit fentanyl, including synthetic opioids with chemical structures related to fentanyl (analogues) and precursor chemicals, into the U.S., as required by law. DHS tasked CBP with establishing the program, but CBP does not have access to the information it needs to do so, such as other components' data and measures. By establishing the required program, DHS would be better positioned to assess the effectiveness of its efforts. Additionally, DHS has not developed performance goals and measures related to its strategic goals for its efforts to combat fentanyl trafficking. By developing performance goals for its strategic goals as well as measures for those performance goals, which could be established through the statutorily required program, DHS would be better positioned to assess progress toward achieving its long-term goals.