

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-21-58](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Treatment for SUD—the recurrent use of substances, such as illicit drugs, causing significant impairment—can help individuals reduce or stop substance use and improve their quality of life. SUDs, and in particular drug misuse, have been a persistent and long-standing public health issue in the United States.

Senate Report 115-289 contains a provision for GAO to review SUD treatment capacity. This report, among other things, describes what is known about SUD treatment facilities, services, and overall capacity; and examines the information SAMHSA uses to assess the effect of three grant programs on access to SUD treatment. GAO analyzed national SAMHSA data on SUD treatment facilities and providers, and reviewed studies that assessed treatment capacity. GAO also reviewed documentation for three of SAMHSA's largest grant programs available to states, and compared the agency's grant data quality to federal internal control standards. Finally, GAO interviewed SAMHSA officials and stakeholders, including provider groups.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that SAMHSA identify and implement changes to the SABG program's data collection efforts to improve two elements of reliability—the consistency and relevance—of data collected on individuals served. SAMHSA concurred with this recommendation.

View [GAO-21-58](#). For more information, contact Alyssa M. Hundrup at (202) 512-7114 or HundrupA@gao.gov.

December 2020

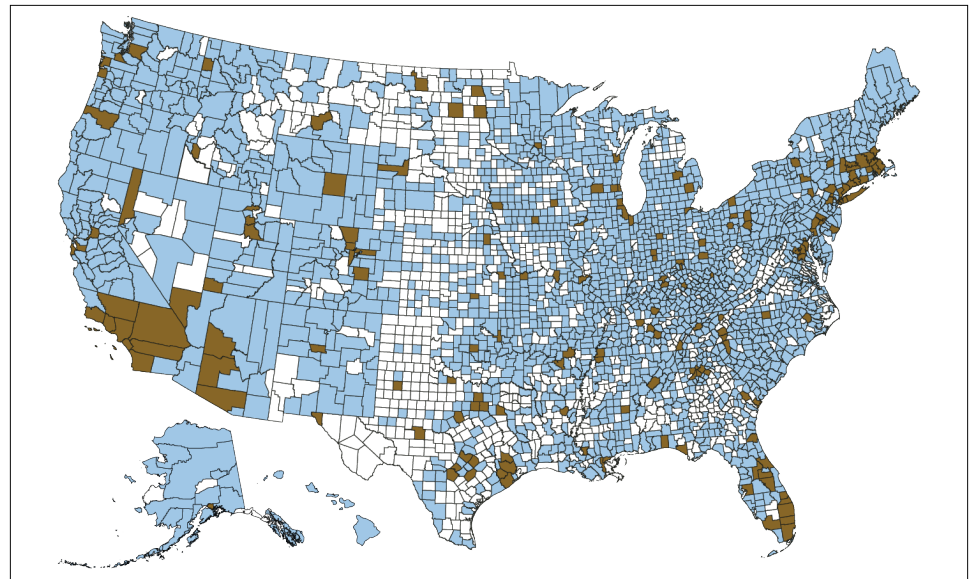
SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER

Reliable Data Needed for Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant Program

What GAO Found

According to Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) data, the number of substance use disorder (SUD) treatment facilities and services increased since 2009. However, potential gaps in treatment capacity remain. For example, SAMHSA data show that, as of May 2020, most counties did not have all levels of SUD treatment available, including outpatient, residential, and hospital inpatient services; nearly one-third of counties had no levels of treatment available. Stakeholders GAO interviewed said it is important to have access to each level for treating individuals with varying SUD severity.

Availability of Substance Use Disorder Treatment Levels, by County, as of May 2020



Counties with...

■ All levels of treatment (6%) ■ Some levels of treatment (63%) □ No levels of treatment (31%)

Source: GAO analysis of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration data. | GAO-21-58

SAMHSA primarily relies on the number of individuals served to assess the effect of three of its largest grant programs on access to SUD treatment and recovery support services. However, GAO found the agency lacks two elements of reliable data—that they be consistent and relevant—for the number of individuals served under the Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant (SABG) program. For example, grantee reporting includes individuals served outside of the program, which limits this measure's relevance for program assessment of access. SAMHSA plans to implement data quality improvements for the SABG program starting in fiscal year 2021. However, the agency has not identified specific changes needed to improve the information it collects on individuals served. As SAMHSA moves forward with its plans, it will be important for it to identify and implement such changes. Doing so will allow SAMHSA to better assess whether the SABG program is achieving a key goal of improving access to SUD treatment and recovery services or whether changes may be needed.