

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-20-337](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Health and Human Services declared the opioid crisis a public health emergency in October 2017. DOL has awarded grants to help address this crisis.

GAO was asked to examine how WIOA-funded programs are addressing the employment and training needs of those affected by SUD. This report examines (1) how workforce agencies in selected states are using WIOA funding to address employment and training needs, (2) challenges agencies face in addressing employment and training needs, and (3) how DOL is supporting communities affected by SUD.

GAO interviewed officials in four of the 10 states that received DOL grants in the early award rounds (as of March 2019)—Maryland, New Hampshire, Ohio, and Washington—and two that did not—Alabama and Arizona; reviewed related documentation and relevant federal laws and regulations; and interviewed DOL officials and researchers, selected for their knowledge about these issues.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOL clarify (1) its expectations of state workforce agencies and (2) how WIOA funding can be used in addressing the needs of those affected by SUD and potential employers, and share information with all states on lessons learned and promising practices. DOL agreed with our recommendations.

View [GAO-20-337](#). For more information, contact Jacqueline M. Nowicki at (617) 788-0580 or nowickij@gao.gov.

May 2020

WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT

Additional DOL Actions Needed to Help States and Employers Address Substance Use Disorder

What GAO Found

Workforce officials GAO interviewed in four of the 10 states receiving targeted Department of Labor (DOL) grants as of March 2019 said they were using Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funding to help meet the unique needs of those affected by substance use disorder (SUD). These officials, who said they had limited experience serving those affected by SUD, worked with required organizational partners and hired specialists to assist job seekers and to provide intensive job readiness services. However, these efforts are relatively new and outcomes are not yet known. Workforce officials GAO interviewed in two selected states without targeted grants said they had viewed SUD primarily as a public health issue, but had recently taken some steps to address it. For example, one state added a workforce subcommittee to an existing opioid task force.

State and local workforce officials in all six states identified a range of challenges they face in addressing the needs of SUD-affected job seekers. For example, criminal history or a lack of transportation may make it difficult for these job seekers to obtain and maintain employment. Officials said another challenge is finding employers who are willing to hire those in recovery. They stated that employers are concerned about the risks to their businesses, such as potential employee relapse and possible negative reaction from customers. Officials were seeking more information and assistance to help address such concerns.

Criminal Histories May Deter Potential Employers from Hiring Those in Recovery



Source: GAO file photo. | GAO-20-337

DOL officials said they support SUD-affected communities mainly by providing information to states that apply for and receive targeted grants. However, officials in two selected states expressed uncertainty about DOL's expectations of states in serving the needs of SUD-affected job seekers and potential employers. Officials in another state said they were unclear on whether they could use non-targeted funds to continue targeted grant activities. GAO's review of related DOL guidance found that it does not provide specific information on expectations of states or the use of WIOA funds outside of targeted grants to address this issue. Further, while DOL has disseminated some information on serving job seekers with SUD (such as in quarterly calls with grant recipients), it does not plan to share information that grantees submit to the agency, such as lessons learned and successes, with all states. Doing so could help states meet the training and employment needs of those in recovery, and the needs of potential employers.