

Why GAO Did This Study

PEPFAR, reauthorized by Congress in fiscal year 2008, supports HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment, and care overseas. The reauthorizing legislation, as well as other U.S. law and government policy, stresses the importance of evaluation for improving program performance, strengthening accountability, and informing decision making. OGAC leads the PEPFAR effort by providing funding and guidance to implementing agencies, primarily CDC and USAID. Responding to legislative mandates, GAO (1) identified PEPFAR evaluation activities and examined the extent to which evaluation findings, conclusions, and recommendations were supported and (2) examined the extent to which PEPFAR policies and procedures adhere to established general evaluation principles. GAO reviewed these principles as well as agencies' policies and guidance; surveyed CDC and USAID officials in 31 PEPFAR countries and 3 regions; and analyzed evaluations provided by OGAC, CDC, and USAID.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that State work with CDC and USAID to (1) improve adherence to common evaluation standards, (2) develop PEPFAR evaluation plans, (3) provide guidance for assessing and documenting evaluators' independence and qualifications, and (4) increase online accessibility of evaluation results.

Commenting jointly with HHS's CDC and USAID, State agreed with these recommendations and noted steps it will take to implement them.

View [GAO-12-673](#). For more information, contact David Gootnick at (202) 512-3149 or gootnickd@gao.gov.

PRESIDENT'S EMERGENCY PLAN FOR AIDS RELIEF

Agencies Can Enhance Evaluation Quality, Planning, and Dissemination

What GAO Found

The Department of State's (State) Office of the U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator (OGAC), the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) have evaluated a wide variety of President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) program activities, demonstrating a clear commitment to evaluation. However, GAO found that the findings, conclusions, and recommendations were not fully supported in many PEPFAR evaluations. Agency officials provided nearly 500 evaluations addressing activities ongoing in fiscal years 2008 through 2010 in all program areas relating to HIV/AIDS treatment, prevention, and care. GAO's assessment of a selected sample of seven OGAC-managed evaluations found that they generally adhered to common evaluation standards, as did most of a selected sample of 15 evaluations managed by CDC and USAID headquarters. Based on this assessment, GAO determined that these evaluations generally contained fully supported findings, conclusions, and recommendations. However, based on a similar assessment of a randomly selected sample taken from 436 evaluations provided by PEPFAR country and regional teams, GAO estimated that 41 percent contained fully supported findings, conclusions, and recommendations, while 44 percent contained partial support and 15 percent were not supported.

Extent to Which Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations Were Supported in Selected Evaluations

Source of PEPFAR evaluation (number assessed)	Fully supported	Partially supported	Not supported
OGAC-managed evaluations (7 total)	7	0	0
CDC and USAID headquarters evaluations (15 total)	9	6	0
Country and regional team evaluations (436 total) ^a	179 (41 percent)	190 (44 percent)	67 (15 percent)

Source: GAO analysis.

^aNumbers and percentages reported in this row are estimates based on analysis of 78 evaluations randomly selected from the 436 total. The margin of error associated with proportion estimates is no more than plus or minus 11 percentage points at the 95 percent level of confidence. The margin of error for totals is not more than 44 evaluations.

State, OGAC, CDC, and USAID have established detailed evaluation policies, as recommended by the American Evaluation Association (AEA). However, PEPFAR does not fully adhere to AEA principles relating to evaluation planning, independence and qualifications of evaluators, and public dissemination of evaluation results. Specifically, OGAC does not require country and regional teams to include evaluation plans in their annual operational plans, limiting its ability to ensure that evaluation resources are appropriately targeted. Further, although OGAC, CDC, and USAID evaluation policies and procedures provide some guidance on how to ensure evaluator independence and qualifications, they do not require documentation of these issues. GAO found that most PEPFAR program evaluations did not fully address whether evaluators had conflicts of interest and some did not include detailed information on the identity and makeup of evaluation teams. Finally, although OGAC, CDC, and USAID use a variety of means to share evaluation findings, not all evaluation reports are available online, limiting their accessibility to the public and their usefulness for PEPFAR decision makers, program managers, and other stakeholders.