

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-23-105644](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

In fiscal year 2022, the command made about \$79.6 million available for program activities and maintained over 800 service providers across 32 locations worldwide to care for special operations forces and their families. However, since January 2016, the command has not completed a program evaluation demonstrating program performance and effectiveness.

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022 includes a provision for GAO to review the program. GAO evaluated the extent to which the command has 1) identified program performance goals and measures and 2) collected and analyzed data to determine how well the program is achieving desired outcomes.

GAO reviewed command policies and guidance and compared processes for data collection and analysis against recommended practices. GAO also interviewed officials managing the program.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making three recommendations, including that the command establish specific and measurable performance goals, establish performance measures that are linked to strategic goals and are clearly stated, and develop a detailed program evaluation plan to support annual program reports. DOD concurred with all three recommendations.

View [GAO-23-105644](#). For more information, contact Cary Russell at (202) 512-5431 or russellc@gao.gov.

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SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES

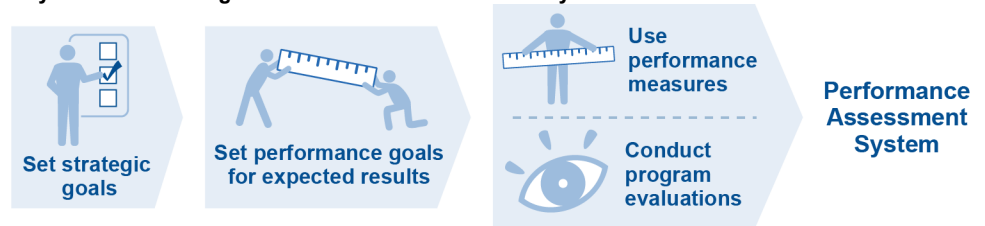
Actions Needed to Assess Performance of the Preservation of the Force and Family Program

What GAO Found

U.S. Special Operations Command established the Preservation of the Force and Family program about a decade ago to address strains that special operations forces and their families can face. The program is designed to provide a holistic system of care that focuses on physical, psychological, spiritual, cognitive, and social areas of well-being. The program offers services including physical therapy, injury care, psychological treatment, family counseling, and peer mentoring.

The command established a program evaluation framework for the program in January 2023. However, it has not fully defined specific and measurable performance goals and clear performance measures (see figure). Specifically, performance goals do not clearly state what is to be achieved, time periods for achievement, nor who is responsible for achieving each goal. Performance measures are not clear and not fully linked to strategic goals. For example, one performance measure is listed as “neurocognitive assessments.” However, the framework does not provide any information about which assessment, what specifically is to be measured, or what methodology will be used to collect and analyze the data. Without fully defining performance goals and measures, the command will have difficulty demonstrating that program activities are achieving their desired goals.

Key Elements of Program Performance Assessment Systems



Source: GAO. | GAO-23-105644

The command has made progress implementing a new data system for the program and establishing minimum data requirements. However, it faces challenges in data collection and analysis, inhibiting its ability to evaluate program effectiveness. For example, the command experienced significant delays in implementing the data system and is in the process of reevaluating its requirements. In addition, some special operations forces’ service components are in the initial stages of collecting required program data, but their data-collection practices vary.

The command established an annual reporting requirement, but has not developed a detailed program evaluation plan to help ensure standardized data collection and analysis. A program evaluation plan that identifies relevant data sources, standardized data collection procedures, and detailed data analysis procedures could help the command align data with performance measures to support its evaluative annual program report. Such a plan could also better position the command to demonstrate the effectiveness of program activities, provide external accountability for the use of public resources, and identify any areas to improve program performance.