

Alameda County Drug Court: An Assessment

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Disclaimer

This report has been conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Public Policy at Mills College. The study has been prepared around the cost-effective analysis and program evaluation of Alameda County's Drug Court. The conclusions are only those of the author and are not endorsed by the Mills College Public Policy Program, the County of Alameda, or any other organization, agency, or individual.

Executive Summary

The ever growing cost of incarceration in the United States has tax payers' worried and marginalized groups feeling targeted. Alternatives to how to approach crime outside of imprisonment was popularized in the 90's as it the repercussions of mass incarceration without results became apparent. Drug courts specifically arose during this time as a way to address drug offenders who were overwhelmingly drug dependent. Drug courts approach drug dependency through the lens that it is a public health issue by offering rehabilitative treatments services to arrested drug dependents in lieu a prison sentence. Studies across the nation find that drug courts are effective in their mission: reducing recidivism and promoting a life of sobriety. Although the costs of drug courts vary, they are significantly less costly than incarceration.

This research is an assessment of Alameda County's Drug Court (ADC) specifically and is intended for strategic use in efforts to obtain more funding for ADC programming. Over the past 10 years, drug courts in California have had a realignment in their funding that has negatively affected how consistent and sufficient their funding once was. The program evaluation and cost-effective analysis reveals that the cost of incarcerating an individual in the state of California is 15 times the amount to get a person through ADC programming. Though the comparative costs and benefits of the drug courts to traditional court processes is apparent, there are areas improvement within ADC programming that can aide in figuring how to approach necessary stakeholders in search of locking in more and consistent funding.

The assessment brings light to two issues that are affecting how effective Alameda's Drug Court is at serving their participants: 1) Participants drop-out rate is more than half of the entering cohort each fiscal year and 2) Data collection is inadequate,

especially in determining what needs of participants not being met, ultimately are causing them to drop-out.

In order to gain buy in from stakeholders, findings from the assessment and ways to overcome them must be structured and framed in a way that utilizes the mutual interests of key stakeholders. The proposed recommendation is to request grant funding from the Judicial Council, ADC's largest stakeholder for the creation of a Retention and Outreach pilot program that is heavily reliant on internal data collection of participants through intermittent interviews and exit interviews.

Implementing the Retention and Outreach pilot program will begin head on as ADC seeks solutions to their low retention rates and act accordingly if the data shows their actions are not in alignment with their mission. Evaluation of program actions and their results will be analyzed, shared, and recommended for statewide use.