

January 2003

Washington's Offender Accountability Act: Update and Progress Report on the Act's Evaluation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 1999, the Washington Legislature passed the Offender Accountability Act (OAA), and full implementation of the Act began by 2001. The Act affects how the state provides community supervision to adults convicted of felony crimes. The OAA directs the Department of Corrections (DOC) to classify all felony offenders according to the risk they pose to re-offending in the future, and the amount of harm they have caused society in the past. The OAA then directs DOC to allocate more of its community-based resources to the higher-risk offenders. The primary goal is to reduce the subsequent criminal behavior of these offenders when they are back in the community.

The OAA directs the Washington State Institute for Public Policy to conduct an evaluation to determine if the Act achieves reduced re-offense rates and improvements in other outcomes. The Institute must report annually on the evaluation.

It is too early in the life of the OAA to determine if the Act has had an effect on recidivism rates. Because a sufficient follow-up period is needed to observe recidivism, our January 2005 report will offer the first opportunity to test whether the OAA reduces crime cost-effectively.

In this year's report, we present the first results on how well DOC's risk assessment tool—the Level of Service Inventory-Revised (LSI-R)—predicts actual recidivism. We examine 27,288 offenders assessed with the LSI-R from 1998 to October 2000 (before the OAA went into effect) and calculate how many were re-convicted for another crime after they were back in the community for 12 months. We find that the LSI-R is able to predict subsequent criminal behavior reasonably well. Those offenders with higher LSI-R scores have considerably higher 12-month recidivism rates than those with lower LSI-R scores.

In this report, we also describe some of the technical statistical steps we are taking to ensure that the OAA's outcomes can be reliably evaluated.