

An Assessment of Washington State's Reentry Community Services Program: Outcome Evaluation, Potential for Expansion, and Effective Components

The 2021 Legislature directed WSIPP to update its evaluation of the Reentry Community Services Program (RCSP), including a benefit-cost analysis. They also directed WSIPP to examine the potential expansion of the RCSP to additional groups and to investigate modifications to the program that would improve effectiveness.

Background

For nearly 25 years, Washington State has operated a program for individuals reentering the community after confinement in a DOC facility who have a mental illness and pose a risk to public safety or themselves. The RCSP provides supportive services to qualifying individuals as they exit prison and reenter the community. WSIPP last evaluated this program in 2009.

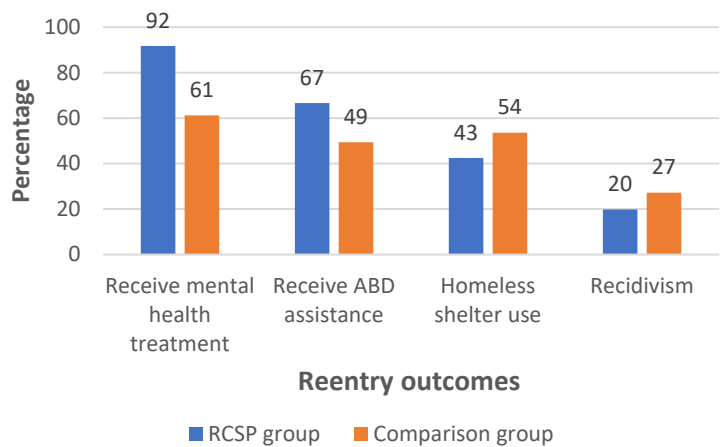
Findings

Using updated methods and reentry outcomes measured between 2012 and 2022, we evaluated the RCSP by comparing differences between program participants and a comparison group. We found that program participation is associated with improved outcomes, including increased uptake of healthcare services and reduced recidivism, primarily during the first 6-12 months after prison release. We cannot tell whether or not the RCSP caused the associations we see between program participation and reentry outcomes.

We applied the results of our outcome evaluation to our benefit-cost model. Despite positive benefits to participants and taxpayers, our benefit-cost analysis suggests that the program's cost is higher than the monetary benefits, in part because program success leads to increased state expenditures. We were unable to monetize a reduction in homeless shelter use.

From a comprehensive literature review of program features, we found that reentry programs providing medication assistance are associated with reduced recidivism. This component is already a feature of the current RCSP model.

Predicted Probability of Outcome: Within Six Months of Prison Release



Assignment Details

Assigned in the 2021 Legislative Session [E2SSB 5304](#), Sponsor: Sen C. Wilson

[Full report available on WSIPP's website](#)

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