Making Drug Courts More Effective

Drug Court is an evidence-based, cost-effective alternative to criminal prosecution for people accused of crimes connected to their chemical dependency\(^1\), with the state’s contribution coming from money saved by not sending people to prison.

A July, 2013 report by the Research and Data Analysis Division of the Washington Department of Social and Health Services compared 1,671 adults admitted to formally established drug courts in Washington to a statistically matched comparison group of 1,671 adults. The reductions in crime observed in the analysis translated into a net benefit to taxpayers and society of approximately $22,000 per participant —or about $4.00 in benefits per dollar spent.\(^2\)

And we have the opportunity to make Drug Courts even more effective!

The Affordable Care Act has dramatically increased the number of drug court participants who are insured – either privately or via Medicaid – freeing up funds to make the program even more effective. That ‘good news,’ however, comes with some ‘bad news.’

- Private insurance often carries co-payments and deductibles – charges that can seem innocuous for the occasional doctor’s visit, but that become onerous when someone goes to treatment several times each week.
  - A $30 co-pay per visit ranges from 14% of median income in Whitman County to 6.7% of median income in King County (8% of statewide median income)
- Medicaid requires a state matching payment, but program officials are erroneously interpreting a pending change in state law to prohibit use of CJTA funding for that cost

As such, we are proposing that RCW 70.96A.350 be amended to explicitly allow use of CJTA funds for co-payments, insurance deductibles and Medicaid matching funds to leverage other sources of treatment funding in a cost-effective way.

In addition, it has been proven\(^3\) that “Recovery Support Services” (RSS) addressing needs related to employment, transportation, housing, medical & legal problems, child care, parenting and other basic necessities, increases success in Drug Court programs. Based on this research, we propose RCW 70.96A.350 be broadened to allow using the CJTA dollars for RSS not covered by other funding, so Drug Courts can be even more-effective solving addiction problems and reducing the number of people sent to Washington prisons. (This would be a secondary use of funds – treatment would continue to be the priority.)

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\(^{3}\) Washington Court and Recovery Enhancement System, Program, Participants, Services and Preliminary Findings