



# Washington State Center for Court Research

## Adult Drug Court 2014 Data Improvement Report

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### Overview

The adult drug court data improvement project, a partnership between Washington's adult felony drug courts and the Washington State Center for Court Research (WSCCR), is designed to collect and report statewide information that policy makers, judicial leadership and local court managers can use. Its focus is the creation of a statewide database of basic information about drug court participants.

That the use of data for program improvement is an established evidence based best practice has been demonstrated for drug courts and in other arenas.<sup>1</sup> Courts and other organizations produce better outcomes when they use data to make decisions. NPC Research, a leading organization studying therapeutic courts, has found use of data to be the number one best practice for generating cost savings.<sup>2</sup> NPC stated: "*Drug Courts where internal review of the data and program statistics led to modifications in program operations had 131% higher cost savings.*"<sup>3</sup> Similarly, NPC found an 85% reduction in recidivism.<sup>4</sup>

### 2014 Results

The project did not attempt to compile a historical record going back to the establishment of the drug courts. Instead the data collection and database includes participants starting drug court on January 1, 2012 and after. This 2014 report is a simple snapshot of participant status at the end of 2013 for those starting drug court in 2012 and 2013. No participants admitted before January 1, 2012 or after December 31, 2013 are included; no events occurring after December 31, 2013 are included.

Because many of the drug court programs take up to 2 years, many participants starting in 2012 and 2013 were still in their programs on December 31, 2013. Therefore, at this point we cannot compute accurate statewide graduation, termination, and retention<sup>5</sup> rates.

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<sup>1</sup> Kroll, A. Exploring the Link between Performance Information Use and Organizational Performance: A Contingency Approach. forthcoming in *Public Performance & Management Review* (2014) ([https://www.lafollette.wisc.edu/images/publications/PIP/Kroll\\_2014\\_PPMR.pdf](https://www.lafollette.wisc.edu/images/publications/PIP/Kroll_2014_PPMR.pdf), accessed November 19, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Carey, S. M., Mackin, J. R., & Finigan, M. W.: What Works? The Ten Key Components of Drug Court: Research-Based Best Practices. *Drug Court Review* (2012), 8:1, 6-42 ([http://www.npresearch.com/Files/Best\\_practices\\_in\\_drug\\_courts\\_2012.pdf](http://www.npresearch.com/Files/Best_practices_in_drug_courts_2012.pdf), accessed November 19, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>5</sup> Retention rate is the percentage of those currently active or have graduated for an identified (e.g., those admitted during some time period) cohort of participants.

At the end of 2013 the status of the 1505 participants starting drug court in **2012** was:

Participants starting drug court	1505
Terminated	391
Opted-out	330
Withdrew	26
Died	2
Graduated	280
Active bench warrant on 12/31/2013	56
Active in drug court (& no bench warrant) on 12/31/2013	410

22 of 23 jurisdictions reporting

Based on these numbers the retention rate at the end of 2013 for 2012 admits was 47% (the percentage of those admitted who had either graduated or were still in the program with no active bench warrant). In addition, 1412 participants started drug court in **2013**. However, it is too soon to report meaningful numbers on them.

The database will be updated annually with year-end data on these participants and those starting drug court in future years. As it grows, a clearer picture of each year's activity and year-to-year changes will emerge. Future reports will also present snapshots, but over time, as participants move through drug court, we will be able to compute meaningful statewide admission, termination, graduation and retention rates. Trends and significant changes in these rates will become visible.

### **How Statewide Drug Court Data Can Be Used**

Policy Makers: Policy makers will get a comprehensive, state-level picture of activity in the drug courts. They will know how many people the courts are serving across the state. They will be able to see how Washington's experience compares with other states by comparing our data with other available data.

Judicial Leadership: Judicial leaders at the state level will also benefit from a statewide view that can be used for decision making.

Local Courts: In each jurisdiction, judicial leadership and court management will know how their court compares with statewide results and with non-Washington jurisdictions.

### **Background: Data Improvement Project**

BJA & SCJA: The project began with a December 2011 request from the Superior Court Judges' Association (SCJA) to WSCCR for a statewide view of participation in adult drug courts including a process for statewide data collection, appropriate analysis of the data collected, and reporting. In response, a basic data collection process has been created.

The data project also responds to the Board for Judicial Administration (BJA) 2012 resolution voicing support for drug courts. The resolution called for identification and adoption of best practices in drug courts, collection of data to evaluate and monitor outcomes and performance, and training for judicial officers and staff on the principles and methods of drug courts.

Objectives: To meet the goals of providing useful information to the courts and policy makers, the objectives for the data improvement project include:

1. Create a statewide database containing basic data on adult drug court cases.
2. Enable reporting to each adult felony drug court in Washington on its:
  - Number of participants entering drug courts.
  - Number of active participants.
  - Number failing to complete drug court.
  - Number graduating.
  - Average length of time to graduation, withdrawal or termination from the program.
3. Provide statewide totals for each category.
4. Facilitate future analysis including statewide level reporting on recidivism of participants by age, gender and race.

### **Background: Adult Drug Courts and Other Therapeutic Courts**

Therapeutic courts in Washington now have a twenty year history beginning with the creation of the adult drug court in King County in 1994. Now there are 82 therapeutic courts of various types including adult (felony), juvenile, family treatment, DUI, DV and veterans courts in 26 of the state's 39 counties representing 96% of the state's population. Adult drug courts are present in 23 counties representing 93% of the state's population. Their current statewide enrollment is estimated at 1550 participants.

Washington's adult drug courts generally conform to the traditional drug court model in which:

- The participant undergoes substance abuse treatment for an extended period of time (usually one to two years).
- The court monitors the participant's progress.
- The participant is required to submit to a urinalysis on a frequent, random schedule.
- The court periodically (at appropriately frequent intervals) conducts a hearing which the participant's progress is reviewed, and the participant and the judge discuss the participant's status.
- The court imposes sanctions for the participant's non-compliance with program requirements, and provides rewards for compliance and progress.
- The participant may be terminated from the program, and returned to the trial court for further proceedings, if violations of program requirements merit.
- The court conducts a formal graduation ceremony for participants who successfully complete the program.
- The court uses a multi-disciplinary team including the judge, prosecutor, defender, law enforcement, treatment provider, case manager, drug court coordinator and others who routinely participate in team meetings and review hearings.

A schematic of the model for drug court program and process is in Appendix B.

Though the majority use a pre-disposition approach in which charges are dismissed if the participant successfully completes the program, some courts are post-disposition where sentencing is stayed and generally, if there is successful completion, either jail time and fines are waived or, in some counties, charges are dismissed. In addition, the courts differ from county to county in terms of process and criteria for admission, court process, use of sanctions and incentives, treatment, and graduation requirements. As noted below, the data improvement project attempts to deal with these differences through the use of standard data definitions,

understanding the different court processes, and identifying for reporting and collection purposes data points (such as participant start date) that can be used consistently with all courts.

## 2014 Data Collection

Method and Process: WSCCR sent a request for data to the 22 adult drug courts (representing 23 counties) in January 2014. WSCCR provided the courts with an empty Excel spreadsheet and requested that the courts return it with data on participants who started drug court in 2012 and 2013. We worked with a group of drug court coordinators to identify a standard set of data elements to be included in the request and to write precise definitions for them. The list of data elements and definitions are in Appendix A. These standard definitions will make possible an accurate and consistent statewide drug court database as the project collects future years' data and assimilates it into the database.

In addition, with the Superior Court Management Information System (SCOMIS) case number the data can be linked to the statewide Judicial Information Criminal history database for calculation and reporting of recidivism at some point in the future. The SCOMIS number also will allow future reporting on participants by age, gender and race.

With one exception, all courts responded with data. The court that did not respond represents less than one percent of the state's adult drug court cases.

Data Assimilation: Assembling the data was complicated because the local courts used a variety of sources to extract their data. These include:

- The Drug Court Case Management System (DCCM) is a commercial web-based software used by nine courts. WSCCR was able to export data for these nine courts directly from its database.
- Unique locally developed databases use database software such as Microsoft Access.
- Locally maintained off-the shelf software from Loryx Systems is used in two counties.
- Local case files include paper records, optically imaged records and Word documents.
- The Superior Court Management Information System (SCOMIS) which the Administrative Office of the Courts maintains. Because drug court data is not entered into SCOMIS in a consistent manner across the state, it is generally not usable to report on drug court cases. However, for one court, where drug court data appeared to be complete, SCOMIS was used.

Database Type	# of Courts
DCCM	9
Unique locally developed database	7
Locally maintained off-the-shelf software	2
Local case files	3
SCOMIS	1
Total courts providing data	22

After WSCCR received the courts' data, the next step was to assemble it into a database form that was consistent across all courts. The issues dealt with in this phase include:

- Record keeping and local court database capabilities are limited and vary from court to court. None of the courts was able to provide all of the data elements requested. All courts did

provide sufficient data to calculate numbers of participants starting their programs, terminated and graduated in 2012 and 2013.

- Drug court process varies from court to court. To deal with this the project identified data points that were consistent, as much as possible, from court to court. To understand the differences and how they fit with the drug court model, the AOC therapeutic court team including the WSCCR researcher visited courts to observe procedures and meet with drug court coordinators, judges and other members of drug court teams.

Process varies particularly with respect to program admission. To mark when a participant entered a program, we tried to identify a participation start date, rather than the formal admission date. A formal admission event in which the participant signs a contract is not necessarily in step with starting the program of treatment, periodic substance abuse testing, and monitoring by the court. Some courts use an opt-in approach where the participant may start treatment, but does not start drug court until formally opting in. Others have a period after the contract is signed in which the participant can opt out and return to the trial court with no contractual obligations. Others have neither opt-in nor opt-out periods.

- Some of the data provided were in raw extract form and had to be converted to the uniform statewide Excel format.

## **Future Development**

The next steps, planned for 2015, for data improvement include:

1. Create a statewide database of drug court cases; move the data from Excel to a true database platform; continue to implement the standard set of data (based on standard data definitions) for each court; include ability to transfer data from Excel data collection instrument to the database, and update existing case records in it; learn how to extract and manipulate data in the database.
2. Based on the results of the 2014 data collection, AOC will provide feedback to the local courts. AOC feedback and local court review will be used to support data improvement. The feedback will cover the validity and usefulness of the data. The AOC will also provide assistance to the courts in order to improve the quality of their data.
3. Based on what was learned in 2014, set up and implement the 2015 data collection; provide technical assistance to courts that need help with data extracts.
4. Develop 2015 reports; continue to move to a standard annual report on activity in adult drug courts that can be used in future years as the available data grows to the point where more meaningful information can be provided.
5. Add reports that breakdown participants by age, gender, race and ethnicity.

## Appendix A: Data Elements and Definitions

**Cause number:** SCOMIS case number(s) for case(s) resulting in referral to drug court. If there is more than one SCOMIS case number, the court may provide all numbers or only one, preferably the one with the most serious charge. If the case came to the drug court from a district court, the court should provide the district court case numbers(s). Courts are encouraged to provide the case numbers for all cases related to the drug court case.

**Referred to drug court date (optional):** The date the case is flagged by any referral source as a potential drug court client and refers the case to determine eligibility.

**Participation started (yes/no):** Indicates whether participant started participating in the drug court program.

**Participation start date:** Date client started participation in the drug court program.

- If the court has an opt-in period and participation does not begin until participant opts-in, use the date that the participant opted-in.
- If the court has an observation period and participation begins when the observation period commences, use the date that the observation period began.

**Opt-in date:** Use if the court has an observation period followed by an opt-in. Indicates the date the participant opted into the program.

**Opted-out (yes/no):** Use if the drug court process includes a formal opt-out period after admission to the program and commencement of participation. Indicates whether participant opted out.

**Opted-out date:** If participant opted out, date participant opted out.

**Withdrew (yes/no):** Use only if the court allows participants to voluntarily withdraw from the program regardless of any provision to opt-in or opt-out.

- If the court does not have a formal opt-in or opt-out period, use to indicate that participant voluntarily withdrew after starting the program.
- If the court does have a formal opt-in or opt-out period, use to indicate that the participant voluntarily withdrew after opting-in or after the expiration of the opt-out period.

**Withdrew date:** If participant voluntarily withdrew, date participant withdrew.

**Terminated (yes/no):** Indicates whether participant was terminated from drug court.

**Terminated date:** If participant was terminated from drug court, date of termination order.

**Graduated/completed (yes/no):** Indicates whether participant successfully completed the program regardless of whether there was a formal graduation ceremony. Successfully completed means that participant satisfied all requirements of the program including finishing treatment, paying required financial obligations, completing required education, achieving required number of clean and sober days etc.

**Graduated/completed date:** If participant successfully completed the program and graduated, graduation date. If participant successfully completed the program, but did not go through a graduation ceremony, use the completion date.

**Suspended or Active Bench Warrant:** Indicates that, as of the end of the data collection period, either (1) participant has been suspended from the program (if the program provides for the suspension of non-compliant participants) or (2) a bench warrant has been issued for defendant and the bench warrant is active.

# Appendix B

## Basic Adult Drug Court Program and Process

