Why WSCCR did this study

This research is part of a larger project requested by Thurston County District Court's administrator and presiding judge to determine how well programs and operations within the district court are meeting objectives.

What WSCCR Recommends

Our single program related recommendation is to reduce the time between referral and program start, an issue already identified and addressed by the new program manager for the two treatment courts.

With regard to data quality and availability we recommend that the metrics used for these evaluations be reviewed for suitability and relevance for future evaluations. The treatment court staff should take part in data mapping so that they understand the sources for data elements used in the evaluation.

These recommendations are intended to provide treatment court staff with the capability to perform regular process evaluations and, with assistance from WSCCR staff, perform outcomes evaluations annually.
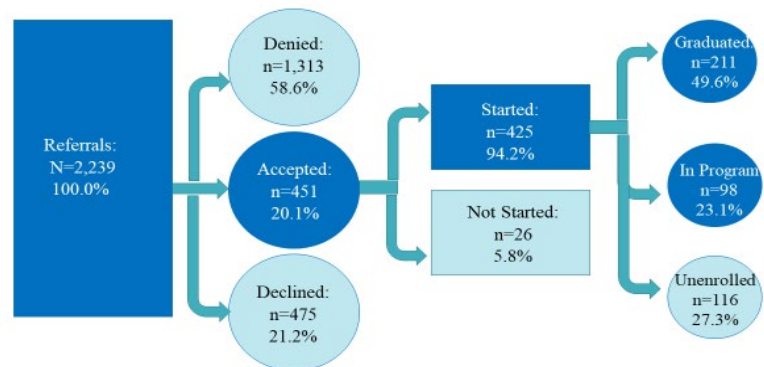
Thurston Mental Health and Veterans' Courts

What WSCCR Found

This Mental Health and Veterans' Courts' (MHVCs) evaluation report begins with a process evaluation, which utilized a combination of quantitative and qualitative data to examine the referral and acceptance process for participants and non-participants, participant progress and program completion. To assess program results, we used data compiled by the treatment courts regarding participant demographics, referral status, and program progress. We examined results at each decision point to identify differences or disparities along gender, age, or racial/ethnic lines. We also looked at the primary reason for non-admissions and who made the non-admission decision.

Since 2008, the two courts had a total of 2,239 individuals referred to them. Of those, 425 have participated in one of the programs, with 211 (49.6%) having successfully graduated and 98 (23.1%) currently enrolled.

The table below compares the demographics of current participants to graduated and disenrolled participants. In both the Mental Health and Veterans' Courts, Black, Latino, and Asian participants were more likely to be either currently enrolled or have successfully completed the program than they were than to be in the disenrolled group. The size of the Veteran's Court in-program Unknown/Other racial category (16.2%). Even though there are only 37 individuals currently enrolled in the Veterans' Court and that Unknown/Other statistic represents relatively few people, efforts should be made to classify all individuals into enumerated categories.

Demographics	Mental Health Court			Veterans' Court		
	In-Program	Disenrolled	Successful Completion	In-Program	Disenrolled	Successful Completion
Total N	61	99	157	37	18	54
Race/Ethnicity						
White/Caucasian (%)	83.6	88.9	77.7	64.9	94.4	77.8
Black/African-American (%)	3.3	10.1	16.6	8.1	5.6	18.5
Latino/Hispanic (%)	4.9	3.0	5.1	8.1	--	7.4
Asian/Pacific Islander (%)	3.3	2.0	4.5	--	--	3.7
Native American (%)	--	2.0	1.3	2.7	--	1.9
Unknown/Other (%)	4.9	1.0	5.7	16.2	--	3.7

In order to determine if the MHVCs decreased recidivism among participants, we compared reoffending rates for treatment court participants to those of similarly situated individuals who never participated in the treatment court. Our comparison group consisted of individuals who were eligible for the same program, but had not participated for reasons[1] that, we believe, do not suggest the individual was more likely to reoffend or fail the program. These classifications resulted in four groups: Veterans' Court treatment group (N=102), Veterans' Court control group (N=48), Mental Health Court treatment group (N=281), and Mental Health Court control group (N=168).

As visible in the figure below, the participant groups reoffended at substantially lower rates than their respective control groups at every point along the 36-month follow-up period. This indicates that the MHVCs are likely more successful than the traditional justice system approach at keeping individuals from reoffending. Further study is needed to confirm these results and ensure that participants are tracked well. Additional data regarding non-participants would also help confirm the control group is an accurate comparison. Capturing non-justice system outcomes such as mental health status, employment, and housing, could also give a better sense how the treatment program has improved the participants' quality of life.

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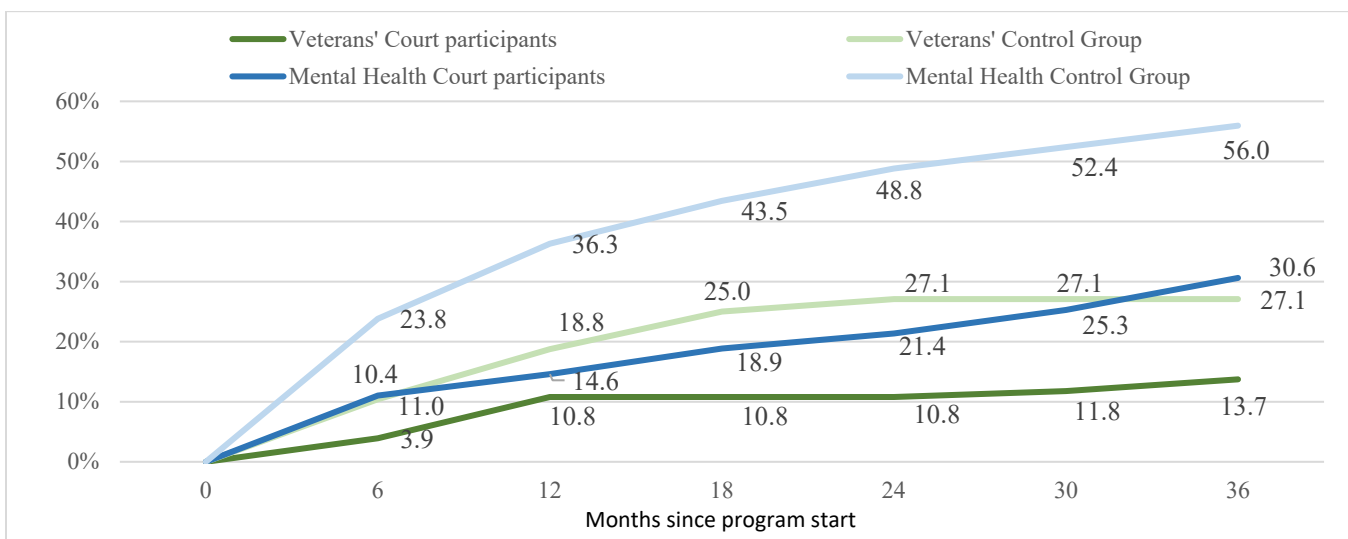
[1] Members of the respective control groups declined to participate because they either: accepted a plea agreement, deferral, or diversion program; had their case dismissed; or put on a waiting list for the program and had not entered the program prior to March 2021.