



NATIONAL CRIME PREVENTION CENTRE

Building the Evidence – **EVALUATION SUMMARIES**

2008-ES-18

DRUG TREATMENT COURT OF VANCOUVER (DTCV)

The Drug Treatment Court of Vancouver (DTCV) implemented between 2001 and 2005 is based on a model for processing drug addicted offenders that has emerged in the United States and has been adapted to the Canadian context. The drug treatment courts have been linked to the growing “problem-solving approach” courts.



The goal of the court program is to reduce heroin and cocaine use in adults charged with offences motivated by drug addiction. The expected outcomes of the program included:

- abstinence from drug use,
- reduced future contact with the criminal justice system,
- improvements in participant well-being,
- improved housing, employment and educational,
- pro-social use of time.

Persons charged under the Controlled Drugs & Substance Abuse Act are eligible for the drug treatment court program. In exchange for less severe sentences, offenders plead guilty and participate in a supervised drug treatment program which includes individual and group counseling and social activities.

In addition to the program activities, participants regularly report to the DTCV judge to review their progress. The judge provides participants with positive reinforcements for success and increasingly firm legal sanctions for lack of progress. In total, 322 adults participated in the program and the evaluation.

Project Assessment

The project evaluation consisted of process and outcome evaluations and a cost effectiveness analysis. The main goal of the evaluation was to determine if participation in the DTCV reduced charges and convictions related to drug use.

Data was collected from court staff, program staff and participants, court files and program documents prior to the start of the program, at regular intervals during the program and 6 months post program. Statistics on criminal charges, court appearances and convictions, urinalysis of program participants and interviews with staff and participants were collected.

In addition, a matched comparison group was constructed from court files based on 166 drug addicted offenders in custodial settings. The method allowed the evaluators to test the extent to which the program was successful in reducing charges and convictions for those in the program.

Key Findings

The process evaluation findings indicated that:

- Almost all (91%) of the program participants had prior court dispositions and 71% had previous custody dispositions after convictions.
- DTCV maintained its minimum capacity of active participants during the course of the program.
- Participants failed to show up for over half the group sessions and over one third of the individual sessions.
- Only 14% of participants completed the program; the remainder (65%) withdrew voluntarily, were discharged by the crown and did not continue, or were asked to leave (20%).
- Participants completed, on average, 15 program hours per month.
- Compliance with court appearances was considered high; participants in the program attended approximately two thirds of all scheduled court appearances.
- Almost all participants were positive about the program and reported that the experience was helpful, increased self esteem, well-being, self control, and vitality.

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The outcome evaluation findings showed that:

- Half (52%) of all DTCV participants had new charges and about 24% had new convictions within 6 months after their participation in the program ended.
- Almost all (88%) participants tested positive for heroin, cocaine or other drugs within 6 months.
- The comparison group analysis indicated that there were no statistically significant reductions in new charges and convictions among program participants.
- Participants completing the program, however, exhibited considerably lower rates of new charges and convictions (10% after six months) when compared to participants who were discharged by the program or the Crown or voluntarily withdrew from DTCV (35%).
- In addition, only 30% of those who completed the program tested positive for cocaine or heroin use within 6 months of program completion.

The cost analysis revealed that:

- For the group of offenders who completed the program, participation in the DTCV was more cost efficient (\$22,248) than the regular processing for their matched comparison group (\$26,736).

Lessons Learned

- Completion of the program is the best predictor of reduced drug use and convictions and the most cost effective means of processing drug related offenses. Strategies are needed to motivate participants to complete the program.
- The DTCV admitted very high risk individuals who were less successful in the program and may require a program of greater intensity and duration.
- Development of a selection method to identify program participants who are most likely to complete the program would potentially increase the completion rate.
- On-going assessment of participants would assist the treatment staff with managing case files and making decisions about client participation.
- Continuous contact is needed between participants living in drug treatment homes and treatment staff for the program to be successful in reducing drug use.
- More emphasis is needed on the housing needs of program participants to help them relocate away from areas with high drug use.

Conclusion

Although many participants maintained patterns of criminal behaviour and substance use after the program, the data suggests that there is a modest but significant decrease in drug use and drug related crimes for those who complete the program. Participants also report that they made important improvements in overall well being as a result of participation in the program.

The evaluation of the Drug Treatment Court of Vancouver provides evidence that specialized treatment programs under court supervision as an alternative to the justice system can be cost effective and reduce crime and drug use but this is dependent on participants' full commitment to, and participation in, the program. Strategies are needed to encourage participants to complete the program for the model to be successful.

For more information or to receive a copy of the final evaluation report please contact the National Crime Prevention Centre at 1-877-302-6272 or visit our website at: www.publicsafety.gc.ca/ncpc.

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