



TOPIC

Expanding Access to Addiction Treatment as a Crime Reduction Strategy

PROBLEM

Many drugs can be criminogenic, either because they increase impulsiveness and aggressiveness when consumed, or because they increase crimes intended to provide money for the drugs, such as theft, prostitution, and drug dealing.

The majority of people who are incarcerated have a substance use disorder, and many were under the influence when they committed the crimes for which they were sentenced.

If addiction treatment is provided in prison, without follow-up care upon release, it does not generally produce significant or enduring benefits.

SOLUTIONS



Treating drug addiction reduces crime and costs associated with crime. Over two years after entering drug treatment, individuals' rates of drug-related and acquisitive crime fall by over 50%, according to a study published in 2004. The economic benefits of providing drug treatment far outweigh the costs.



Expanding access to addiction treatment in criminal justice settings also produces public health benefits. Providing FDA-approved medication to opioid-addicted individuals during and after incarceration reduces illicit drug use (e.g., heroin), needle sharing, and overdose risk.

CONCLUSION

Crime reduction strategies often focus solely on policing and incarceration, but expansion of addiction treatment within the criminal justice system and the community deserves consideration as another approach to protecting public safety and improving health.



KEY POLICY EVIDENCE

Crime reductions are particularly large for heroin-addicted individuals who receive opioid substitution therapy, according to a 1996 study. In this research, sixteen male prisoners were randomly assigned to methadone maintenance treatment upon release, and another sixteen were not. None of the individuals receiving treatment returned to daily heroin use, while all those in the control group did.

Individuals entering therapeutic communities upon leaving prison have 50% longer time to re-incarceration than do untreated individuals.

Estimates on the return on investment in addiction treatment range from 9.5:1 to 18:1, with savings resulting primarily from reduced crime and victim costs of crime.

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...opioid-associated crime, like all crime, extracts an even larger toll when you consider its impact on families and communities.

The most important reason to support treatment is to improve the well-being and social function of people with addiction disorders,” [says Harold Pollack, co-director of the University of Chicago Crime Lab. Mr. Pollack.] But there are other social benefits. When the criminally active get help for this, “the economic value of crime reduction largely or totally offsets the costs of treatment,” he added.

From “Spend a Dollar on Drug Treatment, and Save More on Crime Reduction,” The New York Times, April 24, 2017

