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Nebraska's Drug Courts Evaluation

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Nebraska's Drug Courts Evaluation

The Nebraska Public Policy Center conducted an evaluation of Nebraska's Problem-Solving Courts for the Administrative Office of the Courts. The evaluation was conducted from March – September of 2007 and covered eight probation problem-solving courts in Nebraska, including three adult drug courts (Midwest Nebraska, Northeast Nebraska, Sarpy County), four juvenile drug courts (Scottsbluff, Lancaster County, Douglas County, Sarpy County) and one young adult problem-solving court (Douglas County). The goal of the Nebraska's Problem-solving (Drug) Court evaluation was to understand how well drug courts work, examine offender characteristics, examine current practices and procedures, and determine outcomes for offenders entering problem-solving courts.

Key questions on the evaluation included:

- ***Questions related to participants and potential participants:***

1) Who do the courts intend to serve (target population)?
2) Who are they serving (participant characteristics) and how do participants rate on risk assessment measures?
3) How do participant characteristics compare to admission criteria, sentencing guidelines, and offenders not admitted to drug court (e.g., persons sentenced to probation or imprisonment)?
4) What issues exist related to access to services?

- ***Questions related to program implementation:***

5) What are the core program components for each court, and how are they similar/different?
6) How do practices compare to proposed problem solving court rules?
7) How do current practices compare to best practices (evidence-based and national recommendations)?

- ***Questions related to outcomes:***

8) What are participant outcomes (e.g., post-program recidivism)?
9) How do client characteristics (e.g., severity of offense, demographics, treatment needs) relate to outcomes?
10) How does program implementation (components) relate to outcomes?

The evaluation used a variety of methods to answer these questions , including:

Document Review/analysis *(questions 1, 5)*

- Review of court admission policies
- Review of court policies/procedures
- Synthesis of prior Nebraska evaluations

Literature Review/Synthesis *(question 7)*

- Synthesis of evidence based practices pertaining to problem-solving courts

- Synthesis of best available practices pertaining to substance abuse treatment

Problem-solving Court evaluation *(question 6)*
- Observation related to national standards
- Observations related to policies and procedures

Interview/Focus Groups *(questions 4, 6, 10)*
- Participants/family members/ non participant
- Judges, attorneys, probation, coordinators
- Treatment providers

Data collection/analysis *(questions 2, 3, 5, 8, 10)*
- Demographics of participants/comparison groups
- Offenses/ treatment need
- Quantifiable procedures (i.e. treatment doses)
- Outcome indicators (recidivism, drop-out rates)

Up to date, the data collection and analysis phase have been completed, and the final report will be available in Spring 2008, which will provide a comprehensive summary of key findings and recommendations for Nebraska's drug courts.