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The Comparative Costs and Benefits of Programs to Reduce Crime Version 4.0

ABSTRACT

This report describes the “bottom-line” economics of programs that try to reduce crime. For a wide range of approaches—from prevention programs designed for young children to correctional interventions for juvenile and adult offenders—we systematically analyze evaluations produced in North America over the last 25 years. We then independently determine whether program benefits, as measured by the value to taxpayers and crime victims from a program’s expected effect on crime, are likely to outweigh costs. This procedure allows direct “apples-to-apples” comparisons of the economics of different types of programs designed for widely varying age groups.

Our overall conclusion is one of good news: In the last two decades, research on what works and what doesn’t has developed and, after considering the comparative economics of these options, this information can now be used to improve public resource allocation. These estimates can assist decision-makers in directing scarce public resources toward economically successful programs and away from unsuccessful programs, thereby producing net overall gains to taxpayers, even in the absence of new funding sources. This report provides a snapshot of the Institute’s cost-benefit findings as of May 2001.