

Therapeutic communities (vs. group homes) for court-involved youth with substance use disorder

Juvenile Justice

Benefit-cost estimates updated December 2023. Literature review updated August 2017.

Current estimates replace old estimates. Numbers will change over time as a result of model inputs and monetization methods.

The WSIPP benefit-cost analysis examines, on an apples-to-apples basis, the monetary value of programs or policies to determine whether the benefits from the program exceed its costs. WSIPP's research approach to identifying evidence-based programs and policies has three main steps. First, we determine "what works" (and what does not work) to improve outcomes using a statistical technique called meta-analysis. Second, we calculate whether the benefits of a program exceed its costs. Third, we estimate the risk of investing in a program by testing the sensitivity of our results. For more detail on our methods, see our [Technical Documentation](#).

Program Description: Therapeutic communities (TCs) are a form of intensive substance use disorder treatment. This analysis is on TCs within the community that serve youth who are ordered to chemical dependency diversion or following adjudication. These residential living units are highly structured and utilize a hierarchical model among peers to promote both personal and group accountability in regards to achieving and maintaining substance abstinence. Youth earn responsibility as they progress through the stages of long-term treatment.

Participants in the included study were court-involved youth with substance use disorders. TCs were implemented within a group home-type setting; youth in the comparison group were typically placed in group homes. The average length of treatment was 5.4 months. In the included study, 79% of participants were youth of color and 18% were female.

We exclude evaluations of other (non-TC) substance use disorder treatments and TCs for youth in state institutions from this analysis and analyze them separately.

Benefit-Cost Summary Statistics Per Participant

Benefits to:

Taxpayers	\$701	Benefit to cost ratio	\$0.55
Participants	\$1,477	Benefits minus costs	(\$1,123)
Others	\$761	Chance the program will produce	
Indirect	(\$1,581)	benefits greater than the costs	48%
Total benefits	\$1,358		
Net program cost	(\$2,482)		
Benefits minus cost	(\$1,123)		

The estimates shown are present value, life cycle benefits and costs. All dollars are expressed in the base year chosen for this analysis (2022). The chance the benefits exceed the costs are derived from a Monte Carlo risk analysis. The details on this, as well as the economic discount rates and other relevant parameters are described in our [Technical Documentation](#).

Meta-Analysis of Program Effects

Outcomes measured	Treatment age	No. of effect sizes	Treatment N	Adjusted effect sizes and standard errors used in the benefit-cost analysis						Unadjusted effect size (random effects model)	
				First time ES is estimated			Second time ES is estimated			ES	p-value
				ES	SE	Age	ES	SE	Age		
Crime	16	1	160	-0.030	0.101	17	-0.030	0.101	25	-0.030	0.768
Regular smoking	16	1	160	0.200	0.102	16	0.200	0.102	26	0.200	0.049
Anxiety disorder	16	1	160	-0.289	0.102	16	-0.114	0.094	17	-0.289	0.004
Major depressive disorder	16	1	160	-0.220	0.102	16	0.000	0.310	18	-0.220	0.031
Substance use disorder [^]	16	1	160	-0.270	0.102	16	n/a	n/a	n/a	-0.270	0.008

[^]WSIPP's benefit-cost model does not monetize this outcome.

Meta-analysis is a statistical method to combine the results from separate studies on a program, policy, or topic in order to estimate its effect on an outcome. WSIPP systematically evaluates all credible evaluations we can locate on each topic. The outcomes measured are the types of program impacts that were measured in the research literature (for example, crime or educational attainment). Treatment N represents the total number of individuals or units in the treatment group across the included studies.

An effect size (ES) is a standard metric that summarizes the degree to which a program or policy affects a measured outcome. If the effect size is positive, the outcome increases. If the effect size is negative, the outcome decreases.

Adjusted effect sizes are used to calculate the benefits from our benefit cost model. WSIPP may adjust effect sizes based on methodological characteristics of the study. For example, we may adjust effect sizes when a study has a weak research design or when the program developer is involved in the research. The magnitude of these adjustments varies depending on the topic area.

WSIPP may also adjust the second ES measurement. Research shows the magnitude of some effect sizes decrease over time. For those effect sizes, we estimate outcome-based adjustments which we apply between the first time ES is estimated and the second time ES is estimated. We also report the unadjusted effect size to show the effect sizes before any adjustments have been made. More details about these adjustments can be found in our [Technical Documentation](#).

Detailed Monetary Benefit Estimates Per Participant

Affected outcome:	Resulting benefits: ¹	Benefits accrue to:				
		Taxpayers	Participants	Others ²	Indirect ³	Total
Crime	Criminal justice system	\$625	\$0	\$1,427	\$313	\$2,364
Anxiety disorder	K-12 grade repetition	\$17	\$0	\$0	\$9	\$26
Regular smoking	Labor market earnings associated with smoking	(\$2,674)	(\$6,298)	\$0	\$0	(\$8,972)
Regular smoking	Health care associated with smoking	(\$990)	(\$280)	(\$1,021)	(\$495)	(\$2,785)
Anxiety disorder	Labor market earnings associated with anxiety disorder	\$3,386	\$7,977	\$0	\$0	\$11,364
Anxiety disorder	Health care associated with anxiety disorder	\$344	\$97	\$355	\$172	\$969
Regular smoking	Mortality associated with smoking	(\$8)	(\$20)	\$0	(\$339)	(\$368)
Major depressive disorder	Mortality associated with depression	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$1	\$1
Program cost	Adjustment for deadweight cost of program	\$0	\$0	\$0	(\$1,241)	(\$1,241)
Totals		\$701	\$1,477	\$761	(\$1,581)	\$1,358

¹In addition to the outcomes measured in the meta-analysis table, WSIPP measures benefits and costs estimated from other outcomes associated with those reported in the evaluation literature. For example, empirical research demonstrates that high school graduation leads to reduced crime. These associated measures provide a more complete picture of the detailed costs and benefits of the program.

²"Others" includes benefits to people other than taxpayers and participants. Depending on the program, it could include reductions in crime victimization, the economic benefits from a more educated workforce, and the benefits from employer-paid health insurance.

³"Indirect benefits" includes estimates of the net changes in the value of a statistical life and net changes in the deadweight costs of taxation.

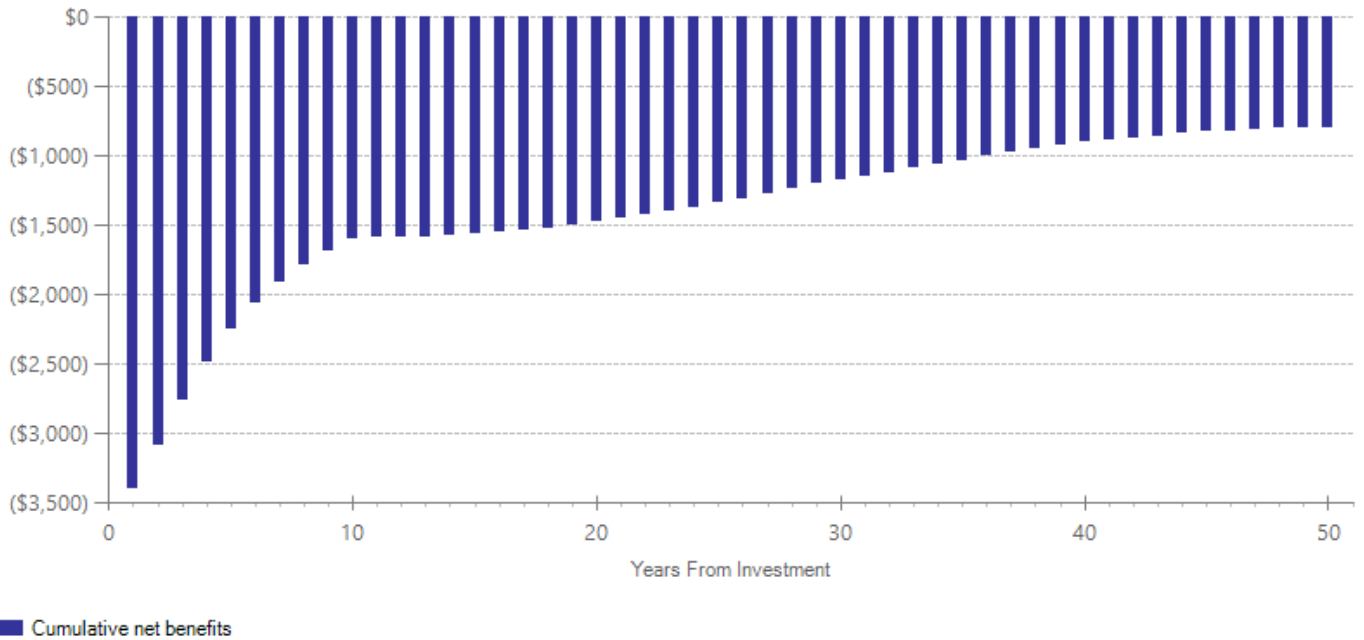
Detailed Annual Cost Estimates Per Participant

	Annual cost	Year dollars	Summary	
Program costs	\$2,020	2012	Present value of net program costs (in 2022 dollars)	(\$2,482)
Comparison costs	\$0	2012	Cost range (+ or -)	20%

The treatment group cost represented the cost of therapeutic communities (TCs) beyond the cost of usual group homes. We estimate the per-participant cost by applying an average monthly cost to the average length of treatment in the included studies. We use an estimated cost of treatment provided by Washington State Juvenile Rehabilitation and assume 12 months of treatment to calculate a typical cost of treatment per month. We multiply this per-month cost by the weighted average length of treatment for the included studies (5.4 months).

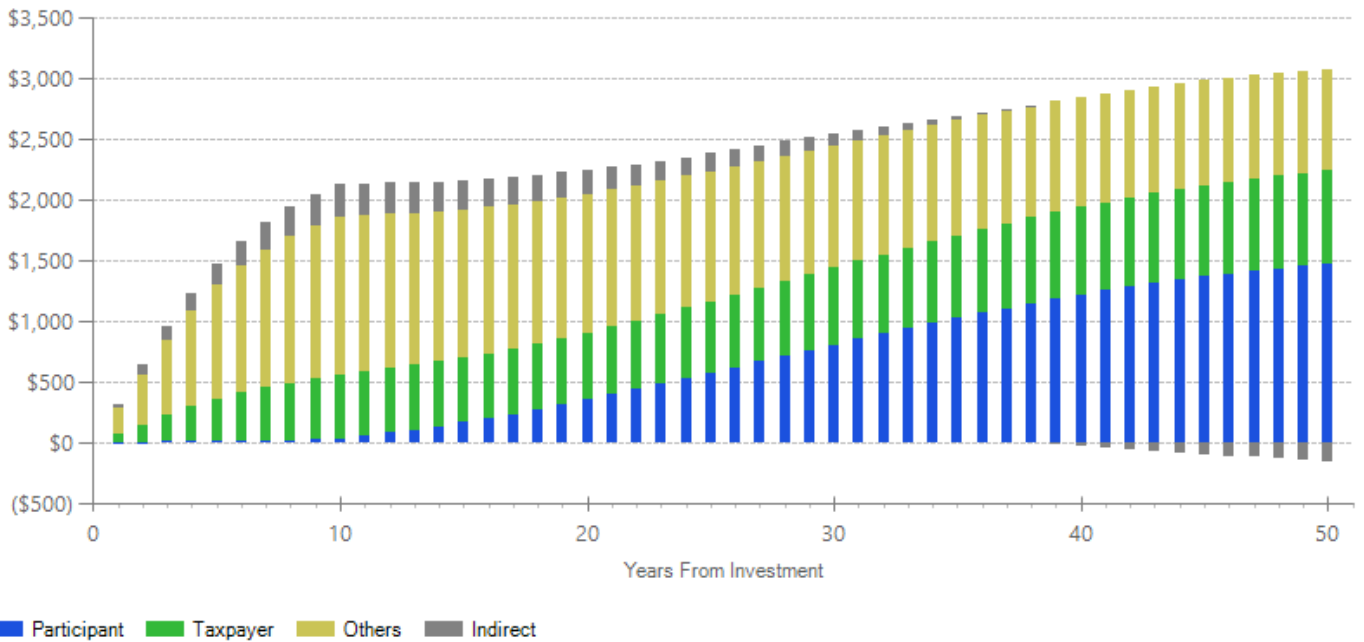
The figures shown are estimates of the costs to implement programs in Washington. The comparison group costs reflect either no treatment or treatment as usual, depending on how effect sizes were calculated in the meta-analysis. The cost range reported above reflects potential variation or uncertainty in the cost estimate; more detail can be found in our [Technical Documentation](#).

Benefits Minus Costs Over Time (Cumulative Discounted Dollars)

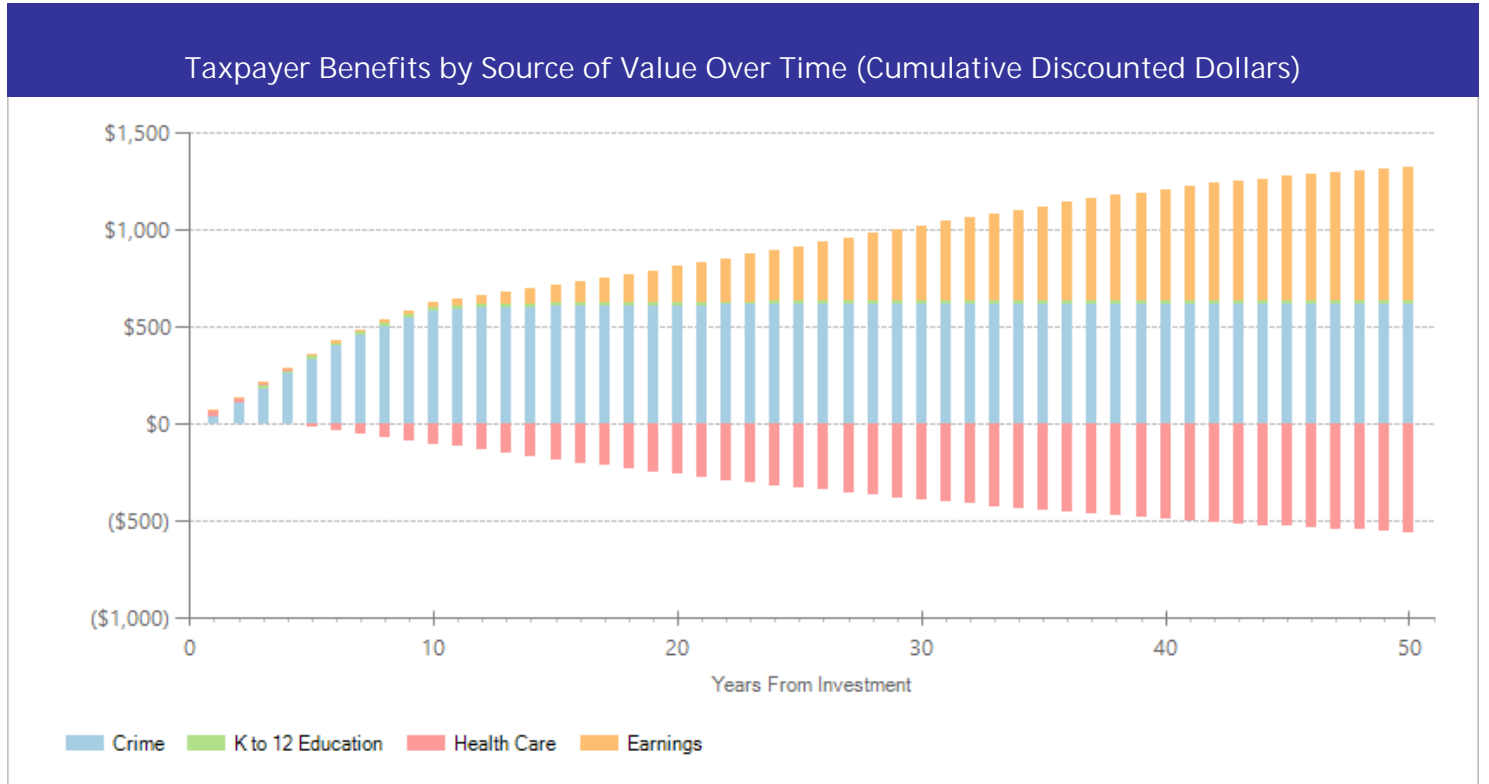


The graph above illustrates the estimated cumulative net benefits per-participant for the first fifty years beyond the initial investment in the program. We present these cash flows in discounted dollars. If the dollars are negative (bars below \$0 line), the cumulative benefits do not outweigh the cost of the program up to that point in time. The program breaks even when the dollars reach \$0. At this point, the total benefits to participants, taxpayers, and others, are equal to the cost of the program. If the dollars are above \$0, the benefits of the program exceed the initial investment.

Benefits by Perspective Over Time (Cumulative Discounted Dollars)



The graph above illustrates the breakdown of the estimated cumulative benefits (not including program costs) per-participant for the first fifty years beyond the initial investment in the program. These cash flows provide a breakdown of the classification of dollars over time into four perspectives: taxpayer, participant, others, and indirect. "Taxpayers" includes expected savings to government and expected increases in tax revenue. "Participants" includes expected increases in earnings and expenditures for items such as health care and college tuition. "Others" includes benefits to people other than taxpayers and participants. Depending on the program, it could include reductions in crime victimization, the economic benefits from a more educated workforce, and the benefits from employer-paid health insurance. "Indirect benefits" includes estimates of the changes in the value of a statistical life and changes in the deadweight costs of taxation. If a section of the bar is below the \$0 line, the program is creating a negative benefit, meaning a loss of value from that perspective.



The graph above focuses on the subset of estimated cumulative benefits that accrue to taxpayers. The cash flows are divided into the source of the value.

Citations Used in the Meta-Analysis

Morral, A.R., McCaffrey, D.F., & Ridgeway, G. (2004). Effectiveness of community-based treatment for substance-abusing adolescents: 12-month outcomes of youths entering Phoenix Academy or alternative probation dispositions. *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors, 18*(3), 257-68.

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