

I. WSIPP's Dynamic Meta-Analyses and Evidence Classifications Over Time

The Washington State Legislature often directs WSIPP to study the effectiveness and assess the potential benefits and costs of programs and policies (“programs”) that are or could be implemented in Washington State. Since the 1990s, WSIPP has used a standard meta-analytic and benefit-cost (meta/BC) approach to assess the potential benefits and costs of programs across different policy areas. These analyses provide policymakers with objective information about which programs work to achieve desired outcomes (e.g., reduced crime or improved health) and the likely long-term economic consequences of these programs.

In recent years, the Legislature has directed WSIPP to use the results of these analyses to classify some programs as “evidence-based,” “research-based,” and “promising.” For juvenile justice programs in Washington, these classifications inform eligibility for state funding.³

WSIPP’s meta/BC analyses and related evidence classifications are dynamic. That is, evidence classifications may change whenever components of our analyses change. This section describes WSIPP’s standard analytic and evidence classification approach, discusses the reasons that findings and evidence classifications may change over time, and details the specific changes to the meta/BC analyses that can affect inventory evidence classifications.

WSIPP’s Standard Meta-Analytic and Benefit-Cost Approach

WSIPP built its first benefit-cost model in 1997 to determine whether juvenile justice programs shown to reduce crime are also cost-beneficial. WSIPP continues to develop and improve this model, and we now apply this approach to more than 400 programs and policies across different policy areas.⁴

WSIPP implements a rigorous three-step research approach to undertake meta/BC analyses. Through these three steps, WSIPP does the following:

- 1) Identifies what works (and what does not) using meta-analysis,
- 2) Assesses the return on investment using BC analysis, and
- 3) Determines the risk of investment.

WSIPP follows a set of standardized procedures for each of these steps ([Exhibit 1](#)). These procedures support the rigor of the analyses and allow programs to be compared on an apples-to-apples basis. For full detail on WSIPP’s methods, see our [Technical Documentation](#).⁵

³ RCW [13.40.530](#) required WSIPP to develop standards for measuring the effectiveness of juvenile accountability programs. Programs that meet these effectiveness standards are eligible for state-funding through a block-grant. Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, (2018). [Report to the legislature: Juvenile court block grant report](#).

⁴ WSIPP uses this standard approach to assess programs in the areas of criminal and juvenile justice, K-12 and early education, child welfare, substance abuse, mental health, public health, public assistance, workforce development, health care, general prevention, and higher education.

⁵ Washington State Institute for Public Policy. (December 2019). [Benefit-cost technical documentation](#). Olympia, WA: Author.

Exhibit 2

Suggested Definitions for the Children’s Services Inventory

Suggested definitions developed by WSIPP & EBPI	
Evidence-based	<p>A program or practice that has been tested in heterogeneous or intended populations with multiple randomized or statistically controlled evaluations or one large multiple-site randomized or statistically controlled evaluation where the weight of the evidence from a systematic review demonstrates sustained improvements in at least one of the following outcomes: child abuse, neglect, or the need for out of home placement; crime; children’s mental health; education; or employment.</p> <p>Further, “evidence-based” means a program or practice that can be implemented with a set of procedures to allow successful replication in Washington and, when possible, has been determined to be cost-beneficial.</p>
Research-based	<p>A program or practice that has been tested with a single randomized or statistically controlled evaluation demonstrating sustained desirable outcomes or where the weight of the evidence from a systematic review supports sustained outcomes as identified in the term “evidence-based” in RCW (the above definition) but does not meet the full criteria for evidence-based.</p> <p>Further, “research-based” means a program or practice that can be implemented with a set of procedures to allow successful replication in Washington.</p>
Promising practices	<p>A program or practice that, based on statistical analyses or a well-established theory of change, shows potential for meeting the “evidence-based” or “research-based” criteria, which could include the use of a program that is evidence-based for outcomes other than the alternative use.</p>
Null	<p>A program or practice for which the results from a random-effects meta-analysis of multiple evaluations or one large multiple-site evaluation are not statistically significant (p-value > 0.20) for relevant outcomes.</p>
Poor outcomes	<p>A program or practice for which the results from a random-effects meta-analysis of multiple evaluations or one large multiple-site evaluation indicate that the practice produces undesirable effects (p-value < 0.20).</p>

Note:

WSIPP’s inventory classifications report separate definitions for research-based practices and evidence-based practices. CJAA commonly refers to programs with research-based or evidence-based classifications as “evidence-based programs” (EBPs).

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Functional Family Therapy (FFT) for youth post-release

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