

Washington's Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) & Recovery Navigator Program (RNP): Opportunities to Improve Pre-Arrest Diversion Fidelity

The legislature directed WSIPP to describe the current state of LEAD and RNP implementation, barriers to achieving higher fidelity to LEAD core principles, and the use of technical support from the LEAD National Support Bureau (LSB). WSIPP engaged in semi-structured interviews with people responsible for implementing diversion, conducted a systematic review of literature, analyzed data collected by the LSB, and conducted a benefit-cost analysis.

Background

Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) was originally developed in Seattle as a strategy for diverting people away from the criminal legal system. In 2019, state funding was provided to expand LEAD into four pilot communities. In 2021, additional funding was provided through the Recovery Navigator Program (RNP) to expand pre-booking diversion statewide.

Barriers identified by participants

- Challenges caused by the RNP rollout process
- Limited buy-in from communities and the criminal legal system
- Perception that diversion does not hold clients accountable
- Insufficient capacity and funding to meet diversion needs
- Staff turnover, retention, and support
- Resource availability for substance use treatment, mental health treatment, and housing
- Data collection sharing challenges
- Overlapping scope of diversion programs
- Training and technical support

Findings

- Implementation still faces substantial challenges. Participants reported reluctance from criminal legal system stakeholders, lack of appropriate housing resources, and insufficient substance use and mental health treatment options as key barriers to implementing diversion.
- Greater effort is needed to achieve the intent behind LEAD and RNP legislation. This includes aligning LEAD core principles with RNP uniform standards, enhancing the provision of technical assistance, and developing statewide data-sharing technologies.
- A review of existing evaluative literature suggested that LEAD and other pre-booking diversion programs have been associated with reduced criminal legal system interaction. Our analysis estimates that every \$1 invested in these programs results in \$7.39 in costs averted.

Limitations

Program-specific fidelity assessments, as directed by Second Engrossed Second Substitute Senate Bill 5536, are still necessary. Perspectives shared during stakeholder interviews may not be representative of all people.

Assignment Details

Assigned in the 2023 Legislative Session
2E2SSB 5536, Sponsor: Sen. Robinson

Full report available on [WSIPP's website](#)

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