

# Results First: Therapeutic Courts Summary

Araceli Valle 9/28/2020)

## Summary from 2017 Results First Report

The Alaska Justice Information Center (AJiC) published “Alaska *Results First* Initiative: Adult Criminal Justice Program Benefit Cost Analysis” (insert link) in September of 2017. This report was the result of a multi-year project conducted in partnership with the Pew-MacArthur Results First (RF) Initiative, and supported by all three branches of Alaska state government.

The RF process provided several key deliverables:

- 1) Program Inventory – a comprehensive list of all programs meant to reduce recidivism, that were funded, at least in part, via direct appropriation in Alaska’s state budget.

Alaska’s FY 2015 direct investment in adult criminal justice programs was approximately \$25.5M annually, with approximately \$4.5 million to Therapeutic Courts.

- 2) Match to evidence – identification of programs in the inventory that were matched to national programs that had been rigorously evaluated.

Overall, 90% of state investment in adult criminal justice programs was directed to programs matched in the national evidence base. \$21M (82.3% of state investment) was dedicated to programs that met rigorous standards required to produce reliable effectiveness estimates. This included all Therapeutic Courts except for the Veteran’s Court.

The program match allows estimation of a program’s expected reduction from baseline recidivism patterns. This is a measure of a program’s **effectiveness**.

**Therapeutic Court programs are highly effective**, with recidivism reduction estimates ranging from 20% to 26.3% over 8 years.

- 3) Benefit-cost ratio for programs that have been rigorously evaluated -- The benefit-cost ratio is a monetary metric for assessing “return on investment.” It can be considered a measure for the **efficiency** of a program in delivering recidivism reduction.

In the RF model, a program’s benefit is defined in monetary terms, as a future avoided costs due to expected recidivism reduction. Benefits are future oriented, consisting of avoided future criminal justice administration costs and avoided victimization costs. The benefit-cost ratio compares future program benefits to current program costs.

A benefit-cost ratio of 1 is “break even” – for every dollar in current program investment, there is a dollar saved in future criminal justice and victim costs. The greater the ratio, the higher the benefit.

Alaska’s Therapeutic courts all had benefit-cost ratios between 0 and 1. These programs have tangible monetary benefits; however, the benefits do not exceed costs.

Report ID	Program name	Benefit cost ratio	Average recidivism reduction
TC-1	Anchorage Municipal DUI Wellness Court	\$0.34	20.2%
TC-2	Felony DUI Wellness Courts	\$0.60	20.0%
TC-3A	Hybrid Therapeutic Courts (modeled as DUI Courts)	\$0.69	20.0%
TC-3B	Hybrid Therapeutic Courts (modeled as Drug Courts)	\$0.80	26.3%
TC-4	Anchorage Felony Drug Wellness Court	\$1.22	26.3%
TC-5	Coordinated Resources Project/Mental Health Courts	\$1.16	20.6%

### Summary

Therapeutic Courts were found to be highly effective but costly. Future benefits, while positive, did not exceed program costs.

Notably, benefit-cost ratios are not fixed! They can be improved by increasing benefits or decreasing costs. Benefits can be improved by targeting participants with more costly recidivism patterns (e.g., DUI felony vs. DUI misdemeanor courts).

As part of the detailed costing exercise required by the model, AJiC explored factors that impacted per person costs within a program type. Several stood out:

- Costs varied greatly based on geography – is remote delivery viable?
- Operating below contracted capacity increases per person cost
- Contract structure – usage based or fixed cost

### Possibility of Updating the RF outcome measures

The data for the RF results is based on FY2015 (or earlier) estimates. The cloud-based Pew-MacArthur RF model was discontinued as of January 1, 2020. It is not possible to model new programs, nor to update the benefits side part of the ratio without the model.

It is theoretically possible to produce a new programmatic cost estimate for existing programs, and compute a benefit-cost ratio using the revised cost. However, even if the specific cost figures needed were available from the courts, the revised b-c ratio would be based on benefits that reflect FY2015 criminal justice costs and criminal justice resource use patterns that are out-of-date, rendering the estimate invalid.