

Over the past 20 years in the United States there has been a trend toward changing criminal justice policy to provide treatment as an alternative to incarceration for nonviolent drug offenders. Two main models have emerged that are aimed at effecting this change. One model is Drug Court; the other is statewide policy reformation, mandating treatment for all nonviolent drug offenders. The overall purposes of this study were twofold: 1. To examine the varying effectiveness of the Drug Court model compared to other criminal justice related models for treating substance abusing offenders measured in terms of participant completion rates, criminal recidivism and cost; and 2. To determine the impact of statewide mandated treatment policy reform on the operation of Drug Courts. California, with the implementation of the Substance Abuse and Crime Prevention Act of 2000 (SACPA), in a state with a large number of Drug Courts already in operation, provided a unique setting in which to examine the effects of the Drug Court model compared to court mandated *non-Drug Court* treatment models on offender outcomes. The research design for this study built on previous work performed by this evaluator in California. Detailed data on program resources (e.g., treatment services), outcomes (e.g., recidivism) and their costs were provided from a study<sup>1</sup> performed before the implementation of SACPA in California (1998-1999). For the current study, detailed program, outcome and cost data were collected (from administrative databases and paper files) on a cohort of Drug Court participants after SACPA implementation (those entering the program in 2002-2003) as well as on a cohort of SACPA participants who enrolled in the program during the same time period. All groups were tracked for 3 years following program entry. Results showed that the state mandated treatment in California (SACPA) succeeded in reaching a large number of eligible offenders and offered treatment for their substance use issues instead of incarceration. It has had a much greater impact on the total system of offenders than Drug Court that often serves only a small number of offenders. However, the Drug Court model showed greater success at producing higher rates of treatment completion and lower recidivism. Further, it did this with a significantly lower per person taxpayer investment. Overall, this data showed that the Drug Court model was a more efficient use of resources. If the resources could be provided for SACPA to incorporate practices of the Drug Court model that have been shown to be effective in this population (or Drug Court could be expanded to include a larger number of drug offenders), then this form of state mandated treatment could be an effective benefit resulting in large cost savings.

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<sup>1</sup> This study was a part of a statewide cost study of Drug Courts in California, funded by BJA and the California Administrative Office of the Courts.