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Innovative Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) Program Is Showing Success

Local Leaders Announce Results of Evaluation of Pre-Booking Diversion Program for Drug and Prostitution Suspects

SEATTLE – A unique coalition of government officials, law enforcement agencies, and community leaders announced today that the innovative LEAD program, operating in Seattle and King County, is successfully reducing recidivism rates for people who participate in it. That is the finding of a report on LEAD released today (available at <http://leadkingcounty.org/lead-evaluation/>), the first part of a three-part evaluation being conducted by researchers at the University of Washington.

In LEAD, instead of arresting low-level drug and prostitution suspects and prosecuting them, law enforcement officers divert them to community-based services – including housing, healthcare, job training, treatment and mental health support. In contrast to most criminal justice system approaches, LEAD uses harm reduction principles. Case managers set goals with participants that are meaningful to them and reduce the harmful impact of their behaviors on themselves and others. Over time, many choose to work toward abstinence.

Using rigorous methods, including a control group of individuals who were arrested and prosecuted as usual, the evaluation showed that LEAD significantly reduced recidivism. People in LEAD were 58% less likely than people in the control group to be arrested. The evaluation findings are explained in greater detail and illustrated in the Summary of “LEAD Program Evaluation: Recidivism Report” at the end of this press release.

The evaluation was funded by the Laura and John Arnold Foundation. LEAD social services and case management have been funded by the Ford Foundation, the Open Society Foundations, the RiverStyx Foundation, the Vital Projects Fund, the Massena Foundation and the City of Seattle.

“LEAD has shown promise as an alternative to jail for low-level drug crimes. Bringing service providers, police, prosecutors and defenders to the table in a collaborative manner works. We are seeing results, and re-investing in the program will touch more of the people who need it most,” said Mayor Ed Murray.

“LEAD has shown us a way to move past the failed War on Drugs and change the racial disproportionality in drug enforcement, without ignoring the harm to health and safety caused by untreated mental illness and addiction,” said King County Executive Dow Constantine. “Now the rest of the nation is looking to King County and Seattle as a model for breaking the cycle.”

“As a downtown resident, I see the impact of drug addiction every day. Seattle Police enforcement efforts emphasize prevention and intervention principles not just because they are effective but because they are humane. Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion exemplifies this and is a key partner as we move forward together to address disorder in our downtown core,” said Chief Kathleen O’Toole, Seattle Police Department.

“This report confirms on paper what my deputies have seen on the street,” said King County Sheriff John Urquhart. “Solutions that address the underlying issues of non-violent crime are much more effective at changing behavior than traditional incarceration.”

“We all knew intuitively that LEAD produces better outcomes than jail. It is good to have the first of many studies prove that to be so,” said King County Prosecuting Attorney Dan Satterberg.

“While many of us have criticized the War on Drugs, it’s incumbent on us to identify ways to respond to legitimate community concerns about drug activity in a less harmful fashion. LEAD is a more effective answer to those community needs than limiting ourselves to a punishment-based approach,” said Pete Holmes, Seattle City Attorney.

LEAD was developed with the community to address open-air drug markets in Seattle and King County and launched in October 2011 in Seattle’s Belltown neighborhood. It has subsequently expanded to other parts of downtown Seattle and the Skyway neighborhood in King County, and is now being replicated in other jurisdictions nationally. The primary goal of the LEAD program is to improve public safety and public order, and to reduce the criminal behavior of people who participate in the program.

“The criminal justice system is the most expensive and ineffective way we could possibly design to try to help people change their behavior. But communities worry about giving up the arrest and punish approach if they feel there is no alternative. This evaluation shows that there is a less harmful way that does a better job of meeting community needs for order and safety,” said Lisa Daugaard, Policy Director at the Public Defender Association.

“Plato spoke about a republic that honors the core ideals of democracy and the power bestowed upon guardians to bear that responsibility. It is our mission to protect the public, and to restore and respect the people we have the opportunity to serve. It is with gratitude and concern for the human condition that we believe in LEAD, believe in the humanity of LEAD and realize that serious problems take serious people to serve those human beings who do not pose an immediate threat to the community. We’ve seen first-hand that LEAD is a significant partnership in re-entry,” said Officer Leslie Mills, Field Supervisor NW Community Response Unit.

“Our traditional means of managing our criminal justice system has resulted in many individuals obtaining a criminal record via a revolving door. LEAD’s approach will give those individuals an opportunity to make things right for themselves and those surrounding them helping them to contribute to society in a positive way. There are many individuals to thank in seeing LEAD go to where it is today, in particular Ms. Lisa Daugaard along with the officers of SPD. I am committed to supporting and helping in any way possible to see LEAD practices making Seattle a better place for all,” said David Watkins, General Manager at Inn at the Market.

“LEAD is working – people who are abusing drugs are being connected with the services and treatment and committing fewer crimes. Dedicating more resources to this program will help provide a long-lasting impact for those who need it and for our community,” said Downtown Seattle Association President and CEO Jon Scholes. “This type of a multi-faceted approach to criminal activity demonstrates a willingness to find a better, more effective approach to reducing drug use on our streets.”

“It's very exciting to see a Housing First approach being applied to engaging addicted people who are living on the street. It's well-established that people are more able to reduce behaviors that harm themselves or trouble others when they are housed, not while they're homeless. Cycling people through jail and court is actually counterproductive in many cases, as it can interrupt services and cause people to lose housing,” said Paul Lambros, Executive Director of Plymouth Housing Group.

LEAD is governed by a Policy Coordinating Group which is made up of a diverse set of stakeholders, including representatives from the Seattle Office of the Mayor; King County Executive Office; Seattle City Council; King County Council; Seattle City Attorney's Office; King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office; Seattle Police Department; King County Sheriff's Office; Washington State Department of Corrections; Community Advisory Boards; the Public Defender Association; and the ACLU of Washington. “One of the main reasons for LEAD's success is that an unlikely group of stakeholders, including law enforcement, elected officials, advocates, service providers, and the community, have come together to find a pragmatic alternative to the failed War on Drugs,” said Mark Cooke, a Campaign Policy Director at the ACLU of Washington.

END



Summary of “LEAD Program Evaluation: Recidivism Report”

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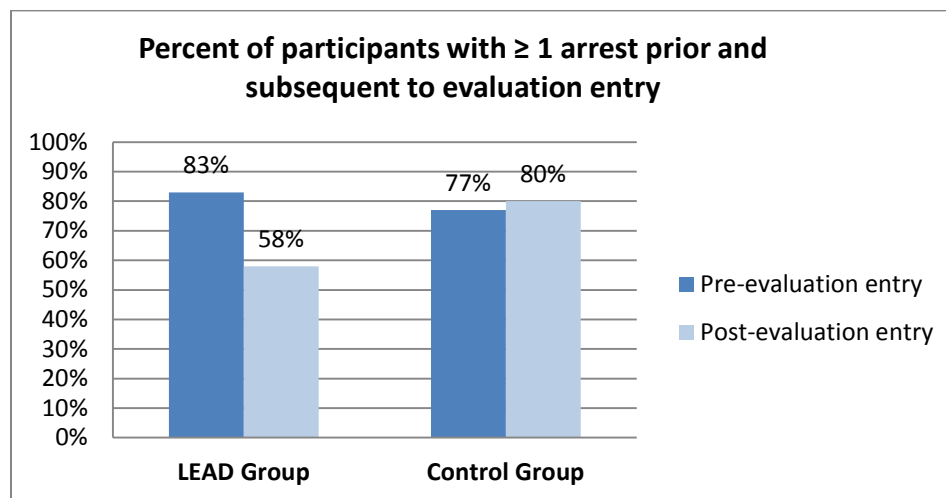
In Seattle’s Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) program, individuals suspected of low-level drug or prostitution criminal activity are diverted by police officers on a voluntary basis to harm reduction oriented case management in lieu of booking and referral for prosecution.

In this evaluation, we analyzed the impact of the LEAD program on recidivism (i.e., new arrests). We used a nonrandomized controlled design with propensity score weighting to ensure comparability of the two groups to the greatest extent possible under real-life conditions.

In this evaluation, we followed 203 people who received LEAD and compared them with 115 people who were in the control group (i.e., were arrested and prosecuted as usual).

This evaluation found that LEAD was associated with significantly reduced recidivism.

- People in LEAD were 60% less likely than people in the control group to be arrested within the first 6 months of the evaluation.
- Over the entire course of the evaluation to date, people in LEAD were 58% less likely than people in the control group to be arrested (see below).



These findings are particularly meaningful when placed in the context of the existing interventions targeting recidivism in King County, Washington. Specifically, LEAD showed more favorable recidivism outcomes compared to the system as usual, which includes various therapeutic courts. This evaluation therefore provides compelling support for LEAD—an innovative approach to reducing criminal recidivism—as a viable alternative to existing criminal justice system approaches.

For further information regarding this report, please contact Dr. Collins at 206-744-9181 or collinss@uw.edu.